I am the way, the truth, and the life . . .

(John 14:3)
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I am the way, the truth and the life . . . John 14:3

What does it mean to walk with and in the God who scripture tells us is the way, the truth and the life? What does it mean to walk in the ways of God? What happens when we follow the advice of the Prophet Micah to act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God (6:8)?

Perhaps we will come to understand that our lives must have a dedicated purpose. Maybe we will come to know how important it is to be attuned to others and that sometimes we must set aside our own destination for one that is shared. Possibly we will come to realize that walking with and in God is the only way to move forward.

As Benedictine Sisters we have found that walking with God leads to the God whom we seek in ourselves, others, our neighborhood, our city, our church, our world. Captured by the good zeal that Benedict speaks of in Chapter 72 of the Rule—a zeal that shows respect, offers support, and is rooted in love—we become energized with passion to walk with God and in God’s ways.

As you read through this issue of The Mount, may you imagine yourself walking with us in the ways of God—walking in the ways of truth and life, peace and justice. Maybe you, too, will find that walking in God’s ways leads to God.

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Cover Photos: Ed Bernik

Ceramic Art by Brother Thomas Bezanson (1929–2007)
Samurai Vase, Honan Tenmoku Glaze
Wheel Form Vase, Honan Tenmoku Glaze

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.
Benedictine Sisters of South Korea

I had the opportunity to be part of an international delegation to visit our sister monasteries in South Korea in September through *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum*, (CIB), an organization of Benedictine women's communities throughout the world. Each year the CIB offers opportunities for small groups of delegates to gather and enter into Benedictine life by visiting communities in other countries. This year the country chosen was South Korea, home to over 1,000 Benedictine women in communities in Seoul, Daegu and Busan. Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, our Director of Development, serves as CIB Secretary and was also part of the delegation.

I felt fortunate to be part of this delegation and had a marvelous two weeks meeting, visiting, engaging with our Korean sisters (and brothers, as we visited some male abbeys, also) and learning about East Asian culture. Our visit truly accomplished the purpose of the CIB: the building of bonds of friendship and sisterhood through shared experiences and mutual learning.

One of the most powerful experiences was when the sisters in South Korea learned that our sisters and oblates in Erie had organized a Holy Hour of Prayer with the intent of praying for peace in Korea. In addition to gathering for prayer in our chapel in Erie while we were gathered in South Korea, Erie Benedictines for Peace shared the prayer online with Benedictine women around the world—specifically through the CIB network in its 19 regions around the world. The Korean sisters were very moved by this sharing of prayer and solidarity; they told us that they have lived with tension between the two Koreas for all of their lives. It is a great source of sadness to them. One community has a Holy Hour of Prayer every week in their monastery to pray for the unification of North and South.

Even though only 10% of South Korea is Catholic, the impact of these communities is great and their faith is strong. The ministries of the sisters, primarily in education and health care, are a significant part of the life of the people. Their monastic *horarium* is rich in prayer and Catholic liturgical life. They are also very friendly with their Buddhist neighbors—we experienced the relationship between the Benedictines and the Buddhist nuns when we visited a large Buddhist temple and training center where the sisters and Buddhist nuns were obviously friends.

Catholicism was brought to South Korea by lay people in the late 1700s. A strong part of their heritage lies in the life and death of the earliest Koreans who died for their faith. The Shrine of the Martyrs, particularly, is a place where they can remember and reverence St. Andrew Kim, the first Korean-born priest, and the other martyrs who perished with him.

Although three-quarters of South Korea is mountainous, the cultivated fields and crops are an important part of Korean monastic life. All of the communities garden and live with and from the land. One community tends over 1,600 pear trees as a major source of income.

The sisters in South Korea were very warm, friendly and welcoming to us and their Benedictine hospitality was exemplary! At the end of our stay they especially wanted us to know that our presence was a sure sign to them of peace and solidarity. Lay people we met shared the same sentiment.

We have so much more in common with people around the world than we have differences. Let us continue to pray for and work for peace in our world.

Christmas blessings to you and yours.

Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
In some of my initial monastic formation experiences, I have spent time reflecting on the Old Testament Book of Job. Suffice it to say Job struggles with God’s ways as he questions: “What purpose does our suffering serve?” “How do we explain the bad things that happen in a world full of God’s goodness?” These are the sorts of questions we struggle with, too.

Job must also deal with the suggestions of his friends who claim that his suffering is God’s way of paying Job back for his bad actions. Tit for tat, as we might say.

But Job will not accept that retributive answer; he knows his own righteousness, and so he continues to grapple with God’s replies and his friends’ words.

Eventually, God comes to Job in a whirlwind storm, reminding him to look at the magnificence and order of the created world. Could Job have contained the sea? (Job 38:8) Could Job have commanded the morning? (Job 38:12) Indeed, it is God’s great power and love at work in creation, not our own ideas and projects that control the world’s unfolding. Job comes to understand his struggle in this divine light, and in chapter 42:6 he gives words to his conversion: “Therefore I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes.” By the end of the Book of Job, the main character goes beyond his old thinking to see the nature of being human in light of God’s great power and love. Job now walks in God’s holy presence.

God’s great power and love come to us in a unique way each year at Christmas. We call this way the Incarnation, making it a fitting time to walk into the heart of humanity. In a year that brought much suffering to the world through acts of crime and terrorism, unprecedented natural disasters, and violent, retributive rhetoric in politics, we can look to Job as hope for the conversion that happens when we go beyond old ways of thinking and acting. Because of the Incarnation, we who call ourselves Christians can look to Jesus as our assurance that we are walking in the Holy Presence each step of our lives.

By Valerie Luckey, OSB, Scholastic
We must go beyond our minds and into our hearts to live this way. No doubt this takes time, but it is already hardwired inside us. “You know how to love because someone loved you first,” I once heard a priest say in a homily. And I believe it. Yes, that love is God deep within us first and foremost, but it is also the God we find in relationship with others, with those who are our models of walking in the Holy Presence, with those who live from a firm belief that God is here among us.

As we reflect on the implications of the Incarnation in our own life, let us look to those who show mercy first and ask questions later, those who withhold judgment and offer compassion, those who open their arms wide enough to embrace all life. I can think of a child who always comes back for a hug no matter how many times I make him stop chewing on a paintbrush. I can think of a mentor who sits with me in my questions that do not hold easy answers. These are the people who know love comes first. Let us allow their holy walking to transform our own.

Job needs a God who is with him to be able to walk from this sacred stance. We all do. The Incarnation reminds us that this God is here, with us all the time, calling us to the daily task of putting love first. Let us immerse ourselves deeply in the Holy Presence. Let us walk in a world where love comes first.

Sister Valerie is a Scholastic, a sister in temporary vows. Read more about the steps to become a Benedictine woman on our website at www.eriebenedictines.org/become-benedictine or contact Sister Marilyn Schauble, Vocation Director, at vocations@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614 ext. 2424

Walking in the Holy Presence

Read Sister Valerie’s blog at http://walkingintheholypresence.blogspot.com/. In it, she shares her journey through initial monastic formation with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. Her unique perspective, love of poetry and creative eye make for inspiring posts.
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.

Together with women religious throughout the nation we pray for our country and renew our commitment, through faithfulness to the Gospel and the Rule of Benedict, to help create a world rooted in love, acceptance, inclusion, peace and justice for all.

PROTECT DREAMERS

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie stand with the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in the call for action to protect Dreamers in light of President Trump’s decision to end DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)—a decision that has thrown thousands of immigrants who came to the United States as children into turmoil as regards their status. Under DACA they were saved from deportation and allowed to live, study and work legally.

As women of faith we take seriously the gospel call to welcome the stranger and care for those in need. LCWR and its members will continue to press for compassion for our neighbors, relief for families, and an end to needless deportations.

CONDEMNATION OF RACISM IN ALL ITS FORMS

The Benedictine Sisters stand with the Leadership Conference on Women Religious (LCWR) in the condemnation of racism in all forms. We accept and support the LCWR statement issued in response to the Charlottesville tragedy and the increase of violence on the part of the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, and White Supremacist groups:

The Leadership Conference of Women Religious condemns racism in all its harmful forms whether the violent acts of the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazis, and White Supremacist groups or the daily acts of hate and discrimination that diminish us all.

We grieve with the citizens of Charlottesville and all people of goodwill. We mourn with all who have lost loved ones, with all who live in fear, with all whose dignity is threatened by hate and violence. We lament the racism that continues to afflict our communities and threaten the values that we hold dear.

We acknowledge our own complicity in institutional racism. We commit ourselves to cleanse our hearts and rid our land of this evil. We promise to pray for our country and to continue to use our voice and our energy to build God’s beloved community where all are one in Christ Jesus.

LCWR is an association of leaders of congregations of Catholic women religious in the United States. The conference has nearly 1300 members, who represent more than 38,800 women religious in the United States. Founded in 1956, LCWR assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today’s world.

NO TO HATRED

While enjoying the annual CelebrateErie Days, Aug. 18–20, Sisters Mary Miller and Mary Lou Kownacki took the opportunity to join with others across the country who were speaking out against bigotry and racism. “We think one of the best things to celebrate in Erie is its diverse population,” explained Sister Mary Miller, “so we wore these simple signs while walking through the festival.” The signs read: “CelebrateErie’s diversity. No to hatred.”

As Vincent Van Gogh said: “Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.” Making a sign, spreading a message, expressing the beauty of diversity—all small things that contribute to the happening of great things. What other small things might we do to spread acceptance, not hate?
Silent Peace Walk: Walking with purpose

Benedictines for Peace (BFP) are sponsoring a new initiative: the Silent Peace Walk. The idea developed from a movement that was started in 2006 in conjunction with the International Day of Peace, traditionally celebrated on September 21. Inaugurated by Piero Falci, a Nonviolence Action Organizer and author who believes that inner peace can lead to world peace, the Silent Peace Walk continues to spread throughout the world.

“When we heard about Falci’s movement it resonated with us immediately,” said Sister Ann Muczynski, BFP steering committee member and one of the organizers of the Erie walk. “The silent peace walk is primarily a way to promote inner peace because that is the foundation for constructive action for justice and peace.”

The Silent Peace Walk is held monthly, 7-7:30 p.m. at a designated spot. Visit the BFP web page at https://www.eriebenedictines.org/bfp for more information and future dates, or to sign up and receive reminders and alerts from BFP for Silent Peace Walks and other events.

Seek Peace and Pursue It

BFP held a Holy Hour for Peace in Korea and for nuclear disarmament on September 14, 2017, at Mount St. Benedict Monastery. As leaders of the US and North Korea were threatening nuclear war, a group of sisters, oblates, neighbors and friends gathered as seekers of peace to pray for the de-escalation of tensions between the two countries and the complete disarming of weapons of mass destruction.

“We prayed with the people of Korea and particularly with our Benedictine sisters from around the world who were gathered in South Korea September 5-19 for the annual conference of the Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (CIB), an international association of leaders of Benedictine women’s communities,” explained Sister Anne McCarthy. “The Holy Hour offered us the opportunity to vigil and pray with all who seek peace around the world, for de-escalation and for respectful dialogue leading to lasting peace and justice.”

The Holy Hour concluded with an invitation to all present to light a candle. Sister Ann Muczynski, BFP steering committee member shared: “Pope Francis has told us: ‘We are called to be heralds of peace, proclaiming and embodying a nonviolent style, a style of peace, with words clearly different from the narrative of fear, and with gestures opposed to the rhetoric of hatred.’ The candle lighting ritual was used to signify an expression of hope and our own commitment to be heralds of peace, recommitting to nonviolence and nuclear disarmament.”
**Profession of Monastic Vows**

When a woman knocks at the monastery door requesting entrance to the postulancy, it is the beginning of a long journey of discernment. She enters into the rhythm of daily monastic life, continuing her discernment for a few years as a postulant and novice before happily arriving to the moment of first monastic profession. In that ritual, she commits herself to God and our Benedictine community for three years. This first profession can be renewed for another three years if requested because the initial monastic formation process is never rushed. If, after this time of living as a member with temporary vows, she is convinced that God is calling her to this community, she requests to make her perpetual monastic profession and the community votes to receive her as a full member. So what is it that we celebrate at monastic professions?

We celebrate the promise to be on a constant journey of seeking God together with sisters who share the same vision and follow the Rule of Benedict. Monastic profession is a covenant of love where a woman declares that God is the center of her life.

As Benedictines, we make promises of obedience, stability, and fidelity to the monastic way of life. These vows are designed to free us and lead us into the radical loving ways of our God.

Obedience is about listening to the voice of God within, without and all around us, specifically in Scripture, in the Rule of Benedict, through the prioress and community. It demands that we listen deeply with the ear of our heart for the call to conversion.

Stability grounds us in a common life together; we are rooted in God and this community. This vow commits us to a willingness to grow where we are here and now with our sisters. And it calls us to create strong relationships that are life-giving and loving.

Fidelity to the monastic way of life is a promise to be open to the Spirit who calls us to growth and change and conversion. It is lived in daily faithfulness to monastic practices, things as simple as showing up for daily prayer, meals, and dishes. This teaches us the process of letting go of control and individualism as more and more God becomes the center of our lives.

Monastic profession makes clear that we are part of a community committed to a lifelong journey of seeking God. Together we can do so much more than we can do alone. As monastic women we live together to support one another, encourage one another and to forgive one another. This common journey reminds us that “Christ will bring us all together to eternal life.” (Rule of Benedict, Chapter 72) It is cause for rejoicing!

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**First Monastic Profession: Sister Valerie Luckey**

On October 21, 2017, Sister Valerie Luckey expressed her desire to commit herself to God in and through the community of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and professed the monastic vows of stability, obedience and fidelity to the monastic way of life for a period of three years.

First Profession of Monastic Vows has moved Sister Valerie, a 29 year old woman from Emmaus, PA and former elementary school teacher, into the third stage of initial monastic profession: the Scholasticate. This is the next step in her ongoing journey of seeking God in community with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. She will be guided by Sister Diane Rabe, Scholastic Director. During this next period of formation Sister Valerie will be engaged in full time ministry at St. Benedict Child Development Center while maintaining participation in the life and prayer of the community.
Perpetual Monastic Profession: Sister Patricia Witulski

“Today we witness the profession of a woman who is responding to the constant call of God,” said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, on the occasion of the Perpetual Monastic Profession of Sister Patricia Witulski, OSB.

“For a woman whose life is about seeking God, perpetual monastic vows become the capstone of that life.” Sister Patricia made her perpetual monastic commitment to the vows of stability, conversion of life, and obedience, on October 7, 2017.

The solemn ceremony took place in the chapel at Mount St. Benedict Monastery.

The celebration began with the entrance procession and the ancient monastic tradition of statio, which also served as a way for the monastic community to lead Sister Patricia into the celebration and ritualize the promise of the community to accompany her on her lifelong journey of seeking God.

Sister Patricia received a profession candle which she lit from the Paschal Candle to reflect a deepening of the commitment made at her baptism where a candle is given to represent the life of the new Christian receiving the light of faith. After the profession of vows, the vow document was signed at the altar by Sister Patricia and Sister Anne. Sister Patricia sang the suscipe, the ancient song of monastic self-offering: “Uphold me, O God, according to your word, and I shall live, and do not fail me in my hope,” and then received the traditional Benedictine ring as a symbol of her total commitment to God and to the Benedictine life.
What inspires (if that’s the word) a middle-aged (if that’s the fact) woman to travel to the other side of the world to spend six months living in a monastery she has recently discovered online? It’s a good question and I’m not sure even now I have the answer. My hunch, however, is that the “brains” behind the plan is the same loving God that led me, once here, to extend my commitment by four months in order to experience a full liturgical year at the monastery.

“My ways are not your ways,” we were reminded in a recent Gospel reading. There’s a lot of truth in that, but I have also found that when I do follow God’s ways, the outcome tends to be far more impressive and impactful than anything I could ever concoct. I am led to incredible places, people and experiences that just happen to be what I need at the time for my psychological and spiritual development.

Such has been the case with my becoming a “Riepper”—a participant in the Benedicta Riepp Monastic Experience Program at Mount St. Benedict Monastery in Erie. If you had told me 18 months ago that I would soon surrender my long-term professional role in Sydney, Australia, and have the means and opportunity to live for six months in an American Benedictine monastery as part of a 12-month sabbatical to explore psychology and spirituality, I would have smiled graciously and subjected you to a quick mini-mental check. Yet, here I am—maybe I am the one needing a mini-mental check!

From my vantage point after seven months living in the monastery, I can readily recognize that this place, the people walking with me and the incredible range of experiences and learning to date, have all the hallmarks of “God-made” stamped on them. Through prayer, ministry, a dynamic community and excellent role models, I have learned much about myself, God, Benedictine and feminine spirituality, peace and non-violence, and the importance of living in and appreciating each God-given moment. I continue to learn and grow each day, having no doubt that God navigated me here, and that it is the Body of Christ walking with me, guiding and supporting me to new life every day.

God is indeed an excellent guide for bumbling wayfarers from all walks of life and lands!

Colleen, a native of New Zealand and a psychologist, is one of more than 15 women who have participated in the Benedicta Riepp Program, named after Mother Benedicta Riepp, the founder of Benedictine life for women in the United States. To learn more about the program contact Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Monastic Formation, at formation@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614, ext. 2511. Read about Mother Benedicta and the monastic experience program at https://www.eriebenedictines.org/benedicta-riepp-monastic-experience.
Oblate Way of Life

Oblates choose to walk with the Erie Benedictines

The annual Oblate Commitment Ceremony was celebrated at Mount St. Benedict Monastery on Saturday, October 28. More than 100 of the 285 oblates were present for the commitment rite that took place at Evening Praise. During the ceremony, nine people became initiates (the initial commitment that leads to becoming an oblate). The initiates of 2016 received the Benedictine medal as a symbol of their commitment and together with the renewing oblates proclaimed their commitment statement 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.

New Oblates
Standing: (L-R) Andreina Alvarado (Erie, PA) and Christina Nord (Glenside, PA)
Seated (L-R) Ginny Slichter and Karin Wishner (Rocky River, OH)
Unable to be present: Bonnie Johnson (Cherryfield, ME)

How is the choice to be an Oblate with the Erie Benedictines a means for you to walk in God’s ways?

Rosemary Gantz, 2017 Initiate

I ask God to use me – put me where I’m needed – show me how to help others in any way I can. As a result, I often find myself being moved into situations I do not expect...crossing paths with people I’ve never met. Each time I look for – and am open to – an opportunity to serve. The Erie Benedictines show me how to live by their example; how to listen for and follow God’s call in my life. They are my beacons, and I look to their work, writings and wisdom. Being an Oblate is a way to maintain this focus throughout my life in association with a community I support with my whole heart.
Diane Cunningham, 2017 Initiate
Simply and humbly put, my need for the depth of solidarity in community is what draws me to the Oblate Way of Life. For 45 years I have ministered in the church, alone, as it were. As I turn 75, I feel a deep need to connect with the Erie Benedictines, who live the deepest lives of centeredness in the Gospel that I have witnessed. I trust that my walk with them will lead me to a rich awareness of God’s ways in my life and ministries.

David Rettman, 2017 Initiate
Many years ago I was incarcerated at SCI-Rockview. I had always had faith and my personal belief in Christ but during my incarceration, and through the tutoring of Fr. Crouse at the prison and Rev. J. Kenneth Laber, I had an epiphany. I realized I had never made a commitment to Christ. After being released from prison I got involved with Fr. Peterson and the Maria House Project. I volunteered with him for many years until his death. Then I began ministering to the incarcerated and those currently released to a halfway house. I have been involved in this ministry for over 25 years. I know that following the Oblate Way of Life with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie will strengthen me in my life of service to these men.

NAABOB 2017
The North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) provides assistance to and ongoing formation for directors of oblates. It provides a forum for discerning needs and issues associated with this formation activity and guidelines for leadership and the oblate way of life. This summer Sister Dianne Sabol, Oblate Co-Director, accompanied by Oblate Margaret Kloecker, had the opportunity to attend the 2017 Biennial Meeting hosted by the Benedictines of St. Scholastica in Duluth, MN. The theme of the conference was “Benedictine Values & Practices: Tools for living, Tools for Life.”
In the Footsteps of Jesus

In July 2017 Oblates Marge and Neil Himber were part of the In the Footsteps of Jesus alternative tour of Palestine and Israel because they “wanted to interact with the Palestinian people, and go behind the wall . . . and wanted to visit the refugee camps and talk to the parents who’ve lost their children.” They had an experience of the holy lands and the Palestinian people that left them with this message to share: “We sincerely feel that a just peace will benefit everyone,” said Neil. “It’s not about religion, it’s about human rights.”

Contributed photo: Marge and Neil visited numerous holy sites in addition to spending time with and learning directly from the Palestinian people during their alternative tour of Israel. This photo was taken at Hisham’s Palace.

International Oblate Congress

Sister Ann Hoffman, Oblate Co-director, and Oblate Joanne Cahill attended the 4th international Oblate Congress in Rome, November 4-11, 2017. As part of the preparation, each oblate community worldwide was challenged to submit a poster to showcase oblate life around the world. Erie’s contribution showcased how our oblates are responding to the challenges offered by Pope Francis through his encyclical Laudato si’ (On Care for Our Common Home) thus highlighting the responsibility of oblates in a broken world. The poster was designed with the help of Sister Linda Romey. It was replicated in the form of a prayer card for every person embracing the Oblate Way of Life with the Erie Benedictines.

In Memoriam

We remember our recently deceased oblates:

- William Lynch     Lima Ohio
- Herman Klauk      Erie, PA
- Jane Leyde        Hermitage, PA
When I agreed to co-organize a 100-mile bike ride, I didn't really expect it to happen. Not only was I wrong, but I could never have imagined that the idea would become, "Cycling with Sisters: We're on a Mission Together," a live-streamed social justice event highlighting the good work of religious women around the country. The actual ride took place between North East, PA, and Niagara Falls, Canada; the virtual ride drew the participation of thousands.

Fifteen of us arrived at our 6:15 a.m. pre-dawn rendezvous at Lake Country Bike in North East on a sunshiny Monday in early October, some of us complete strangers. An enthusiastic group of supporters saw us off and by the time we arrived at Niagara Falls 12 hours later, our common mission and in-the-saddle camaraderie—as well as our neon pink shirts—had given us a group identity: we were now co-participants in a great event, marked by this experience, changed by our own sense of accomplishment.

My co-organizer, Stephanie Hall, Director of Communications and Public Relations for the Sisters of St. Joseph of NWPA, and I had billed Cycling with Sisters as a “social media and pedaling pilgrimage to promote the social justice work of Catholic sisters and their collaborators.”

At five stops along the route, we live-streamed prayer and initiatives around social justice issues: human trafficking, poverty, violence and racism, environmental degradation and immigration. “What a wonderful experience it was to bike with women to showcase the hard work sisters and their communities do every day to bring about social justice,” said Breanna Mekuly, rider and staff member at Emmaus Ministries.

Thousands of people virtually accompanied us via the Communicators for Women Religious (CWR—www.c4wr.org) Facebook page. That’s because we were riding under the auspices of CWR to the organization’s annual conference being held in Niagara Falls Oct. 3–6.

CWR, a professional organization of communications personnel, provides a network of support and education for those who promote the image and mission of women religious. Stephanie sits on the CWR Board of Directors and she and I were both on the planning committee for this year’s conference—which is how we ended up planning the ride. We felt that calling attention to the passion and work of religious women and their collaborators via social media made sense and what better way than by doing something that we both love—cycling.

For me, the deepest meaning of the ride lay in the faces of those I carried in my heart as I pedaled along the route—faces of mothers whose sons died in senseless gun violence, of children finally being able to play in a safe environment, of refugees fleeing war-torn countries. And the faces of religious women and their oblates and associates who have committed their lives and their resources to building up some small part of the Reign of God. For in the end, this is what our true pilgrimage is.
How does it feel to wake up one morning and know that you have lived 100 years?

No Erie Benedictine has ever been able to answer that question...until now. On October 15, Sister Placida Anheuser celebrated her 100th birthday surrounded by friends and community.

And how do you gift someone who is 100 years old? We’ve known Placida long enough to know that she loves words: poetry, scripture, books, a good discussion and new ideas. So we journeyed the 100 days leading up to her 100th birthday by gifting her each day with a written piece from one of us: a poem, quote or short narrative, a scripture passage or book review, an original poem or story.

By her birthday, she had two binders full of these personal messages of love and gratitude: “You have been steady and faithful in the school of God’s service for so many of your 100 years...” “Your life’s work has weared you but your strengths are still your strengths. I thank you for this witness... I wish you a happy birthday and continue, and continue, and continue to love the monastic way.” “You are my model for the good zeal of monastics...good zeal that commits us to the happiness of the human community.”

And Placida, daily, responded to each message, tracking each sister down to express what each “captivating and miraculous” greeting had meant to her in words equally captivating: “Your greeting jumps with joy as do the stylish fuchsia daisies. How I love that exciting color, too. And your nice note dressed in it – a work of art. Thank you so!”

“My first reaction to seeing the notebook and reading the introductory explanation of where the pages were coming from was like Mary’s reaction to the angel: ‘How can this be?!’ But it seems the same Spirit touched all your hearts so ‘that the thoughts of many (sisters) would be revealed.’ And what a variety of thoughts, warm wishes, poems and prayers have come to me since that first day! As I have often marveled at the adventure of living monastic life, I marveled at the magic behind the serial birthday greetings, mysteriously appearing at my door day by day and for a whopping 100 days! What a plot and smooth unfolding of such a complex plan, supported by the essential efforts of the so many. Those nice notebooks will live on for me and for all to read and enjoy, and marvel at, for even longer than just those 100 days. What a dramatic cast, expect 100 curtain calls!”

And then we parted, with balloons and ribbons and plenty of ice cream cake, stories, laughter and singing. Sister Placida, undaunted by the majesty of the momentous occasion, left us with a final, and humorous, perspective – by quoting Bob Hope: “I don’t feel old. I don’t feel anything until about noon. That is when it’s time for my nap.”
As Vocation Director, I walk with many people who are wondering if they might have a vocation to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie — or perhaps to another religious community. As part of the process we talk about the importance of discernment in all decision making.

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

Discernment is uniquely our own process and takes time. If you are discerning a religious vocation, gather as much information as possible and take an objective stance. Listen to what God is saying through other people, through scripture, and through events. Then put your imagination to work. Envision outcomes. List the advantages and disadvantages of each outcome. Spend time with them. Reflect on what you are feeling. Listen to what your heart is telling you. And don’t forget: inner peace is the ultimate sign of God’s presence and good discernment. Pray for inner peace.

WALKING IN THE WAY OF VOCATION DISCERNMENT

Jacqueline Small, Oblate

When I came to spend the summer of 2015 at Mount St. Benedict Monastery, I just wanted to fulfill a requirement for my Masters of Divinity through the Joan Chittister Summer Internship. I didn’t know what to expect from this foray into monasticism, but I told myself, “It’s only ten weeks. You can do anything for ten weeks.”

But something happened in those ten weeks—not one event I could pinpoint, exactly, but somewhere amid praying with the community, and the stories sisters told me, and the work they taught me to do, I started wondering if vowed monasticism was something I could do for the rest of my life.

When the summer ended, I found myself crying for weeks, missing the monastery. For the next two years, as I finished my degrees, I visited every few months, joyful every time I came, and crying every time I left.

Finally, I graduated, packed up my things, and moved to an apartment near the monastery to work full-time at Monasteries of the Heart and Benetvision and continue discerning, seriously, whether life in this community is right for me. The word “discern” comes from the Latin discere, meaning “to learn,” and I want this to be a time for learning about the community, monasticism, God, and myself.

And I’ve been learning: through conversations with endlessly patient sisters, through observing their interactions, through prayer and journaling, and through talking things over with loved ones. But so far it’s been a time of more questions than answers: What will the future of this community look like, realistically? If I enter the community, would I miss the freedoms I have now? How would it affect my parents? Could I give up the idea of biological children? And if I don’t enter, what kind of life would interest me? Would I be able to develop my gifts to the extent I could in this community? How would I honor the values that have become so meaningful to me?

In Tales from a Magic Monastery, Theophane wrote that it took one monk 50 years to climb the Mountain of Decision before becoming a monk. The protagonist asks him, “Do you have to see first before you decide, or do you decide first and then see?” “If you’ll take my advice,” the monk said, “you’ll drop the questions and go right up the mountain.”

I suspect that might be the soundest advice I could receive. But I’m not ready yet to reach the top of the mountain. I’m still taking in the sights of the climb, learning from those who went ahead of me. And while I’m eager to know where I’m going, I’m incredibly lucky to have so much support along the way.
In Memoriam

The lives of our sisters, the faithfulness they lived so well, the seeking of God in which they persevered until their last breath, remain with us in memory and call us to be present in the here and now, to live fully alive so that we too may live into the fullness of life with God who seeks us even as we seek. Complete obituaries are available online at www.eriebenedictines.org/obituary-sisters.

Our sister, Dona, was faithful unto death and now enjoys the gift of eternal life. Dona never stopped seeking God through prayer, community and service. She was committed to her ministries of teaching, tutoring, and offering welcome to guests. When ill health prevented fulltime ministry she assisted in ways that she thought were small yet were big because they were done with steady and selfless care.

For Dona, giving of herself was a privilege, not a duty, and it was in the giving of herself to God and others that she was able to find meaning and fulfillment.

May the simplicity of this woman be a reminder to all of us that great things are accomplished when we live with intention and purpose, sincerity and dedication. In this way God will indeed be glorified in all manner of being now and evermore. Amen.

Sister Dona Obenrader, OSB
August 29, 1928 – August 19, 2017

Canisius College, Buffalo, NY

Winter Service Experience
January 7 – 13, 2018
Students spend time with the community in prayer, ministry and spirituality
Marilyn Schauble, OSB – Hosting

February Service Experience
February 18 – 21, 2018
Students spend time with the community in prayer, ministry and spirituality
Marilyn Schauble, OSB – Hosting

“Be the Light” Leadership Retreat
March 16-17, 2018
Students and Staff
Funded by the Lily-Foundation Youth Theology Institute
Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB – Facilitating
Marilyn Schauble, OSB – Hosting

Following the Path Retreat
July 13-14, 2017
Discernment Retreat for women considering Benedictine religious life.
Joan Chittister, OSB – Facilitating
Marilyn Schauble, OSB – Hosting

Vocation Tip Line
If you know someone that might be interested in Monastic Life with the Erie Benedictines please contact Sister Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director vocations@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614.

Uphold me, O God, according to your Word and I shall live. Do not fail me in my hope.

Perpetual
Monastic Profession
July 8, 1955
By Jo Clarke, Oblate
Director of Annual Giving

By now you will have received and, hopefully, read Prioress Sister Anne Wambach’s letter asking you to consider a Christmas gift to the sisters. If you have already sent a gift...thank you! If you haven’t, I would ask you to go back and re-read her letter, look at the card, and see all of the amazing words that donors, friends, oblates and sisters used to describe this Community.

Now think.... what would it be like in Erie, in this country, and in the world without the Benedictine Sisters and all that they do?! It’s hard to imagine I know. However, to build for the future the sisters need your help.

Personally, I’m incredibly lucky because I work with the sisters everyday through my ministry of fundraising. I am an oblate so I celebrate feast days and special occasions with them. I’m a donor so I feel that I have invested in our future together. They’re my chosen family, and it's that relationship, in its many facets, that makes me want to support them in all these ways, including financially. Why? Because I want this Community to continue what it’s doing both now and into the future.

Your financial gift truly brings these words and their meanings to life. Together we can be a powerful force to counter the divisiveness in our society, where the words of free speech are often used to sow fear and hatred. Gary Chapman, in his book, *Love as a Way of Life*, says that words can be either “bullets or seeds.” That is why the positive words surrounding these pages can be seeds for real change.

Your financial support GIVES...

+ **DIGNITY** to the family that shares a meal at the soup kitchen; and the gift of **CELEBRATION** to their child who sat in his high chair, blew out candles, ate cake, and opened gifts on his first birthday, surrounded by **LOVE** and singing.

+ **SAFETY** to neighborhood teenagers who have a gym that they can call home... a safe, fun place to go to after school.

+ **ENCOURAGEMENT** to children, who might not otherwise have the opportunity, to experience free, after school classes in art, dance, poetry, music, and acting.

+ **SUPPORT** to kids who enjoy a hot free meal after school.

+ **HELP** to toddlers of low income families and migrant workers for access to quality child care.

+ **OPPORTUNITIES** and **EQUALITY** for job seeking mothers and fathers who receive instruction in computer and technology skills that is crucial in the 21st century.

+ **PEACE** of mind for low income elderly who can experience living in a safe, comfortable apartment situated in the country, adjacent to the monastery.
**POSITIVE WORDS—AND YOUR SUPPORT—CAN SEED CHANGE**

**By Jo Clarke, Oblate**

**Director of Annual Giving**

**COMPASSION** and **JUSTICE** to the life of refugees who can’t speak English, and who receive the additional support needed to find employment as they transition to life in this country.

**BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY** to members of our online monastery. **SEEKERS** from all over the world are able to follow the centuries-old tradition of Benedict to seek God in their everyday lives.

**HOSPITALITY** to 1000+ visitors looking for a short break from an increasingly fast-paced world, looking to experience the **COMMUNITY** and **PRAYER LIFE** offered to the guests who walk through the doors of this monastery.

**COMMUNITY** and **HOPE** to the 285 oblates who are an extended part of this Community

**LIFE** and **CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT** as we maintain our home, Mount St. Benedict Monastery, through sustainable energy and conservation.

**A PASSION** for **JUSTICE** and **NONVIOLENCE** by reclaiming sites of death from acts of violence through prayer services, by promoting peace through monthly silent peace walks, and by holding vigils for peace at the monastery.

Your goodwill and support will ensure that all of this, plus much hidden work, will continue.

I don't know what your financial situation is nor do I know what your financial commitments are. I do know that you have a relationship with this Community because you received this magazine. Please take a moment to reflect on what the Community has meant in your life and consider supporting the sisters this Christmas.

知 that we are grateful for every gift, whatever the amount. We would love to spend 100% of our income directly on these important programs. However, in order to have the flexibility to adapt and respond to the unknown needs of the future, I would ask you to consider a general Christmas gift to support the sisters and their mission. **It will provide the means for us to meet the basic needs of everyday life — pay our bills, buy food, welcome guests, and provide for our elders!** Your Christmas gift is a gift to the future of this Community, our ministry, and our mission.

**THERE ARE A NUMBER OF WAYS YOU CAN HELP**

**YOU CAN BE A PART OF OUR ANNUAL GIVING PROGRAM** and commit to a yearly gift to support the mission and ministry of the sisters. This will enable the sisters to respond to unforeseen circumstances and be used when and where help is needed most. This can be done with a **one-time gift** or you can choose to make a **recurring gift** throughout the year.

**A RECURRING GIFT IS EASY AND CONVENIENT** because you can preauthorize your gifts to be charged automatically to your credit or debit card each month, quarterly, or semi-annually. You can also arrange for your gift to be sent to us directly from your bank. This is efficient, convenient and cost-effective for both you, the donor, and for us, the recipient of your generosity. You don't have to write a check and put it in the mail or remember each month to charge your gift. It's cost-effective for us because we save postage and time asking you to renew your annual commitment. It's also money that we know that we can count on.

**BELIEVE IN A FUTURE WITH POSSIBILITIES FOR ALL by including this Community in your will.** A will can be a wonderful way to make a substantial gift when you might not have the disposable assets to do so at this time. A bequest will ensure that part of your estate will continue to benefit others through the work of the sisters and be part of your own living legacy. Please consult your attorney for the correct wording to make a bequest to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in your will. Our legal title is **The Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Inc.** Please let us know if you decide to include the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in your will or, if you have questions, contact Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, Director of Development, at 814-899-0614, Ext. 2409 or email srmaryjane@mtstbenedict.org. You can also contact Emma Lee McCloskey, Director of Major and Planned Giving, at 814-899-0614, Ext. 2415 or email elmccloskey@mtstbenedict.org.
IF YOU OWN AN IRA, AND ARE 70 1/2 OR OLDER
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 report the donation as taxable income. If you are interested in making such a gift, please talk directly with your IRA plan administrator to learn their procedure for making a rollover gift, and then call Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, at Mount St. Benedict Monastery, 814-899-0614, Ext 2409.

AND LAST, BUT NOT LEAST, THANK YOU for helping us spread the message of PEACE, JOY and HOPE proclaimed by the Angels at Jesus’ birth that first Christmas. We hope you will carry the tiny insert card that was tucked into the Christmas appeal with you throughout the year to remind you that together, as community, all good things are possible, particularly in difficult times.

Alternative Gift Giving This Christmas Season

By Patti Eichen, Development Associate

Take a moment, close your eyes and think to yourself, “What was the best Christmas gift I ever received?” For some of us, in a matter of seconds we can recall the moment we received that special gift; for others, we may have to think long and hard before we answer. Maybe some of us are still waiting to experience the moment we receive that special gift.

When I consider choosing a gift for a family member, friend, or co-worker, it is my hope the gift has special meaning for the recipient and they will always remember the moment it was received.

The Benedictine Sisters Alternative Gift Program is a wonderful way to ensure that your gift has special meaning for the recipient as well as for others. A gift to the Benedictine Sisters in honor of, or in celebration of, an important person in your life or in memory of a deceased loved one will be appreciated not only by the person honored, but also by the sisters.

When an alternative gift is given to the Benedictine Sisters, a special Christmas card will be sent to the person or family member of the person in whose name the gift is given. You will be named in the card but your gift amount will not be included. You, the donor, will receive a separate acknowledgment for your records.

The needs of Mount St. Benedict Monastery and the sisters are ever changing. What remains constant are: food, utilities, transportation, grounds keeping and home maintenance. Your gift to the sisters and those they serve through the Alternative Gift Program will help you put more meaning into your gift giving.

Now imagine opening up your eyes to see the wonder of how many lives will be touched by your thoughtfulness and generosity and how special your gift is to the recipient. That is something to remember!

In the true meaning and spirit of Christmas, please consider an alternative gift to support the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

You can consider this form of gift giving not only at Christmas but also throughout the year to acknowledge birthdays, anniversaries, and other special life events.

May PEACE fill your heart, our world, the universe this Christmas and the whole year through.
Sister Anne Wambach and the Sisters

To send your Christmas gift to the sisters, either use the remittance envelope included in this magazine or go to our secure website, ErieBenedictines.org and click on DONATE. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need anything. I can be reached at 814-899-0614 Ext. 2281, or email me at joclarke@mtstbenedict.org.

My promise to you this Christmas is that your gift to the sisters will have a lasting impact on the lives of thousands of children, women, and men of all faiths. Thank you for all of your support and thank you for believing in the spirit of Christmas.
Building an online store seemed like an impossible dream but with creative thinking, perseverance and hard work under the direction of Sister Linda Romey, web developer, the web committee is excited to announce the online, smaller version of Chapter 57, our monastery gift shop. Initial online offerings include Mount St. Benedict Monastery t-shirts and sweatshirts, hand-crafted greeting cards, select artwork and music and prayer resources. Our first special offer is a set of four Worshipping Angel Cards: notecards featuring the stained glass angel windows installed in 1915 in the original Benedictine Sisters of Erie monastery chapel on East 9th Street in Erie for just $4.00.

Over the next months we will be fine-tuning your shopping experience as we experiment with different options and offerings and get your feedback through an optional survey.

Visit www.eriebenedictines.org/chapter57 for details and to shop at our new online store. The store features photos of all available items, many of them unique and created by artists of the monastery, easy ordering and payment, printable invoices, and shipping or pick up options for your convenience. Our prices are not inflated and the proceeds from all sales help to support our community and our ministries.

About Chapter 57

The name of our gift shop comes from Chapter 57 of the Rule of St. Benedict, "The Artisans of the Monastery": if there are artisans in the monastery, they are to practice their craft with all humility, but only with the permission of the prioress or the abbot. If one of them becomes puffed up by skillfulness in the craft, and feels that they are conferring something on the monastery, they are to be removed from practicing the craft and not allowed to resume it unless, after manifesting humility, they are so ordered by the prioress or abbot. Whenever products of these artisans are sold, those responsible for the sale must not dare to practice any fraud. Let them always remember Ananias and Sapphira, who incurred bodily death (Acts 5:1–11), lest they and all who perpetrate fraud in monastery affairs suffer spiritual death. The evil of avarice must have no part in establishing prices, which should, therefore, always be a little lower than people outside the monastery are able to set. "so that in all things God may be glorified (1 Pt 4:11)."

Web Committee:
Jo Clarke, Oblate, Store Photographer
Susan Doubet, OSB
Dina Lauricella, OSB
Karen Oprencok, OSB
Linda Romey, OSB, Web Developer
Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB, Communications Director
FORMING A MONASTIC HEART IN PRISON

Jacqueline Small, a Benetvision staff member, interviewed two prison chaplains who minister in a California women’s prison and facilitate two Monasteries of the Heart communities there. Barbara Redmond and Jane Eggleston, who have over 20 years of experience volunteering with prisoners, discussed their excitement about the 2018 Joan Chittister “Everywoman” calendar, and the ways that they use the Fund for Prisoners materials with incarcerated women.

Why did you get so excited when you saw the “Everywoman” calendar?
Barbara: Well, when we get The Monastic Way, (a monthly spiritual publication published by Benetvision) or any other publication, we filter it all through how we believe this will affect the women we minister with in prison. When I first saw the calendar, it was a series of YES, YES, YES.
Jane: For the women to get a calendar that says “Everywoman” and features a different woman each month with an echo quote from Sister Joan—they can relate and be lifted up and told that their stories matter. Most conversations about prisons are about men’s prisons, but the situations in women’s prisons are different and deplorable. Rules for prisons are geared toward men. Most of the officers are men. The emphasis in this calendar is on women!

Which of the women featured will especially resonate with the women you work with?
Barbara: The Mothers of the Disappeared stood out to me—many of the women lost children, or had their children taken away by the courts. It’s not the same exact loss suffered by the Mothers of the Disappeared, but it will touch that reality.
Jane: One of the women in a group I have will identify with Fannie Lou Hamer’s quote: (“You can pray until you faint, but unless you get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it into your lap.) This woman is a Buddhist. She’s been in prison 50 years; she is a mentor. She’s lived through so many evangelical volunteers who come into the prison to convert them to their way of thinking. She says to other prisoners, “you need to make a change in yourself, know what you’ve done and move through it—not just pray.” She’s a realist, and she’s come through her own hell and knows what it means to have no patience for injustice. She does care for the marginalized, the excluded, those who are pushed aside within the prison.

How do you use the Fund for Prisoners materials?
Barbara: In my Monasteries of the Heart group we are using Sister Joan’s guided journal, The Way to Inner Freedom. It deals with humility in The Rule of Benedict. They love it—the reflections and questions are deep. They require honesty and intimacy with themselves. Surprisingly, the women are able and willing
to face themselves. Everything they share is considered confidential and sacred. We hold hands in prayer and we don’t want to break the chain of trust. We ask how can we cooperate and live in the here and now with integrity and honesty.

Jane: In my group, we are involved in the spirituality of the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous and utilize The Monastic Way. Sister Joan’s words can be applied to daily life and their individual, specific day to day reality.

Barbara and Jane: We also put out The Monastic Way and people take them to others. It’s like feeding a starving person. The beauty and loveliness of the paper— I mean come on! Most things in prison come on cheap memo paper. The Monastic Way is portable—they can keep it with them, in their pocket. They don’t have a lot of opportunity to get together and have conversations, but if they do, they talk about that day’s reflection. They can keep The Monastic Way even when their cells are searched and raided. Not just contraband can be taken; even pens, books and approved televisions and radios can be. But not The Monastic Way.

You can understand how grateful we are not just to Benetvision and the Benedictines, but to the donors who make all this possible. If only there was some way to let them know what they are doing for women whose stories would be so different—so many of them never finished high school—if they hadn’t gotten off on the wrong foot. We wish we could tell them about these women and how they are EVERY WOMAN in dreams and hopes.

We don’t go in alone. The Benedictine community, all donors, all who are praying for us and contributing a Monastic Way donation, are doing prison ministry. We go with the prayers and the support of so many people. We are so grateful and so fortunate. Thank you.

BUILDING BENEDICTINE COMMUNITIES

By Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB
Director of Monasteries of the Heart and Benetvision Publishing

In October, Sisters Anne McCarthy and Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski facilitated an annual retreat for inmates at the Ohio Reformatory for Women, who have formed a thriving Monasteries of the Heart group.

“Monasteries of the Heart has become a leaven within the huge prison,” said Erie Benedictine Anne McCarthy after returning from co-leading her fourth day-long retreat at the women’s prison in Marysville, OH.

Monasteries of the Heart is an international movement sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie to spread the values of Benedictine life to a new generation of seekers.

The original Monasteries of the Heart community in the prison, Sacred Sisters Monasteries, has grown to 30 members. “As the word about the spiritual community spreads more women are asking to join,” said Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, the other retreat co-leader. Members of Sacred Sisters are now mentoring a second Monasteries of the Heart community of 14 women and are positioned to launch two more after that because there are 70 more women on the waiting list.

“Ohio really concentrates on rehabilitating people in prison and so encourages initiatives like Monasteries of the Heart because it can truly change lives,” explained Jackie Burns, a volunteer at the prison who began Sacred Sisters in 2012 and now shares leadership with another volunteer, Shirley France. Because both women are Benedictine oblates—Jackie with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and Shirley with the Benedictine Sisters of Ferdinand, IN—they are already familiar with the monastic charism. And they are imparting it to the women prisoners.

The Sacred Sisters monastic community is viewing a DVD series, The Heart of the Rule with Joan Chittister, during its year-long study of The Rule of Benedict. Under the mentorship of Sacred Sisters, a second community is discussing the book, The Monastery of the Heart by Joan Chittister. These meetings are opportunities for the women to discuss spiritual topics pertinent to prison life. During a recent meeting dealing with Benedictine prayer, for example, the mentor shared her experience of trying to find times for regular daily prayer within the institution’s schedule.

Once a year, Sisters Anne McCarthy and Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski facilitate a Monasteries of the Heart retreat at the prison for members and those interested in membership. “The whole day was unbelievable but a highlight was when the women prepared charades depicting the essential Benedictine values,” said Sister Anne. “It was a wonderful combination of humor and teaching.” And Sister Carolyn added, “The hardest part is leaving the women and knowing we won’t see them for another year. What makes the separation easier is knowing how strongly committed the women are to a Benedictine lifestyle. It is so inspiring to see monastic spirituality being spread through the entire institution.”

For more information: www.monasteriesoftheheart.org or www.joanchittister.org
When it became necessary for Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, long-time organizer and leader of spiritual programs, to curtail some of her activities, I was sad and anxious, and distressed that the Women in Transition program would need to be discontinued,” shared Beth Sammartino Blood. “Then I remembered Sister Joan Chittister's wisdom: ‘This is not a time for despair but for action.’

To that end, Beth, a faithful participant in Sister Carolyn’s programs and retreats for more than 10 years began Women in Transition Continued. She invited Becky Spudich, Oblate, to help her. “I was pleased that Beth asked me to help her plan and present the Women in Transition Continued retreats,” said Becky. “I always leave our gathering feeling a sense of oneness with the ladies who are able to join us. Laughter, tears, sharing and support are all experienced during our retreats. Women caring for women—I am honored to be part of it.” As Beth and Becky planned the program they kept Sister Carolyn in mind: “We felt compelled to honor the tried and true living legacy of Sister Carolyn,” said Beth. “We began an 'in-house' program and maintained the five program components we learned from Sister Carolyn: prayer, presentation, creative activity, silence and reflection, and shared wisdom.”

The setting for Women in Transition (WIT) Continued in-house program found a home in Beth’s home. “Initially I worried about numbers,” Beth shared, “but Joanne Cahill, Oblate, another faithful participant in Carolyn’s programs reassured me: ‘What is more important than numbers and plans is this: keep following the call that opportunities such as the one you are providing for women are needed.’” The participants attest to this: “Going to WIT is a gift I give myself,” shared Bev. “It helps me to be with others and learn that I am not alone. No matter who we are or what kind of work we do, we all have struggles. By getting together and sharing our thoughts and experiences we learn from each other.” And Cindi had this to say: “I’m still processing the wisdom shared during the WIT weekend. I learn best in a group setting and bonding with the women gives me strength when I need it the most.”

Through this past year there have been four successful and spirit-filled gatherings of 9-10 women. In addition to using Sister Carolyn’s five component program model, Beth and Becky added their own personal touches. The program now includes taking up a collection of donations specific to the needs of impoverished women and children, and the study of a dynamic woman in history.

The participants have been inspired by learning about women such as Dorothy Day, Brigid Kildare and Alice Walker, to name a few. Most recently, the participants had the opportunity to hear from Sister Carolyn herself, whom Beth had invited to attend to share reflections about the continuation of the program in a home setting after decades of being held in the monastery. Specifically, Carolyn was asked to respond to the question: Do you perceive any ‘common thread’ that connects the participants in the women in transition program, no matter where they gather?

Sister Carolyn was thrilled and grateful to attend the gathering in Beth’s home, “I am so pleased that Beth and Becky are able to offer this program for women in transition,” said Sister Carolyn, “It doesn’t really matter where it takes place. The place is not the common thread; the common thread (for me) is the YEARNING in the women no matter what their background, issues, economic status, or geographical location. We are all SEEKERS on a common journey throughout our lives.” Sister Carolyn also spoke about the women’s intuitive sense of the common bond that forms when personal sharing occurs, “I have experienced this reality come to fruition many times, especially when the women allow themselves to be vulnerable and open to the conversation.”

Beth and Becky remain open to the Spirit and to the unfolding of this new endeavor: Women in Transition Continued. They keep Sister Carolyn’s parting message in mind: “Wherever even two or three are gathered in God’s Spirit, God is present.”
The mission of the Committee for Alternative Resource Energy (CARE) is 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.

*The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life.*

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Sí*

By Annette Marshall, OSB and Marlene Trambley, Oblate

Benedictine Sisters join 2030

Something new is happening in Erie and the Benedictine Sisters are part of it. Businesses including UPMC Hamot Hospital, Erie Insurance, Gannon University and National Fuel Gas have been meeting with Green Building Alliance to establish the Erie 2030 District. The Erie Benedictines are joining in this local effort to address climate change in the “business center” of our city.

The 2030 District Initiative is an international effort whose focus is reducing energy usage, and therefore carbon generation, in urban areas. The primary goal is to achieve a 50% decrease by the year 2030 in three primary areas: building energy, water use and transportation emissions. Seventeen cities have joined the program nationally, including Cleveland and Pittsburgh. To learn more, go to www.2030districts.org.

Making the switch

Using renewable energy sources such as wind and solar to produce electricity provides two important benefits. First, the burning of fossil fuels is eliminated which greatly reduces the human impact on climate change. Second, as its name implies, renewable energy sources are continuously available and do not require destructive practices such as mining.

Sister Diane Cook, treasurer for the Erie Benedictines, said of the community’s efforts, “We had been using partially green energy for some time. Early in 2017 we decided to explore what was available and what it would cost to use 100% renewable energy. We found that very competitive rates were available so that we could be both environmentally responsible and economically prudent at the same time.”

Ready to consider making the switch? Numerous reputable organizations have posted comparison shopping rates and guidance for making it happen. Consult our web page resource listing for some of these: www.eriebenedictines.org/care

TIPS for Sustainable Living

1. Winter is coming – weather strip drafty doors and windows and save on those heating bills.
2. Use reusable bags for holiday shopping and all shopping – reduce dependence on oil and emissions during plastic production.
3. Get involved in legislation to protect our land, our water, our air, our future.
4. Switch to LED lighting – save on electricity bills. Check with your energy supplier for possible rebates.
5. It’s a great time to purchase green energy – reduce dependence on fossil fuels and promote the development of renewable energy sources.

We’ve been called to action

As people of faith, we have always been called to care for the earth. Pope Francis has “raised the bar” by rigorously proclaiming that environmental degradation, especially as it affects climate change, is a moral issue, pointing out that the poor suffer the most from climate change even though they have contributed the least to it.

It is not only the social, environmental and economic impact that concerns us. This call to action on behalf of the environment is equally a call for social justice. It begins with a call to personal conversion.

—Sister Pat Lupo
Celebrating 70 and 60 years of Monastic Profession

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie opened their annual August community days with a special evening prayer and a renewal of vows by this year’s jubilarians. Sisters Mary Grace Hanes, Andrea Weidle and Mary Bernard Lander renewed their monastic vows in celebration of 70 years of profession and Sisters Laura Beichner and Carol Ann McLaughlin renewed their monastic vows in celebration of 60 years of profession.

Celebrating 50 Years

Congratulations to Sister Margaret Ann Pilewski on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee celebrated on September 23 at Mount St. Benedict Monastery.

Catholic Rural Ministry in the Oil City Deanery marks 10 years

Sisters Mary Hoffman and Phyllis Schleicher of Catholic Rural Ministry (CRM) in Potter and McKean Counties (photo: left) offer their congratulations to Sisters Marian Wehler and Tina Geiger (photo: right). For the past decade Benedictine Sister Marian Wehler has poured her heart into Catholic Rural Ministry of the Oil City Deanery in the northwestern Pennsylvania Diocese of Erie. She and Sister Tina Geiger, RSM, CRM co-director for the past five years, serve the needs of the Oil City Deanery, including 14 parishes, four elementary schools and one high school. They also serve on local social needs boards, minister at the State Correctional Institution-Forest, and offer Bible studies and youth and adult retreats.
Erie Benedictines visit Korea

Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, was part of an international delegation that visited our sister monasteries in South Korea in September through Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum, (CIB), an organization of Benedictine women’s communities throughout the world. Each year the CIB offers opportunities for small groups of delegates to gather and enter into Benedictine life by visiting communities in other countries. This year the country chosen was South Korea, home to over 1,000 Benedictine women in communities in Seoul, Daegu and Busan. Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, Director of Development, serves as CIB Secretary and was also part of the delegation.

Annual Benedictine-Benetwood Dinner

The monastery dining room was full on the night of September 1. The Erie Benedictines welcomed their neighbors from Benetwood Apartments for what has become an annual event: Evening Prayer and a special dinner – a simple celebration of friendship, faith, food and fun.

Benetwood Apartments, a community ministry that offers monastic hospitality to low income, elderly, and handicapped persons, is located on property adjacent to the monastery. The apartment building is a government subsidized non-profit facility administrated by Sister Patricia Hause, OSB. Her staff includes Benedictine Sister Marla Bleil, Wendy Wallace and new assistant manager, Ryan Eckert.

Fairfield Hose Company comes to dinner

Saying thank you to the Fairfield Hose Company has always been important to the Erie Benedictines. The volunteer fire company has been serving the neighborhood since 1945. This year’s Appreciation Dinner was held on October 17. Sister Marcia Sigler (photo: left), having served for 10 years as an active volunteer EMT (Emergency Medical Technician), is considered an honorary member of the company and helps to make the event a memorable one, including the organization of the table decorations and door prizes.
Annual Employee Appreciation Picnic

It was a perfect summer day for the Employee Picnic. Employees and their families joined the sisters for the annual appreciation event. Food, fun and friendship were shared; games and swimming were enjoyed. “Our employees are very special people and we are happy to tell them how much we appreciate them with this picnic,” said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. “They do so much for us and we are very grateful.” The picnic was organized by Sister Judith Trambley, Personnel Director, Sister Diane Cook, Treasurer, and Sister Diane Rabe, Dean of the Monastery.

A Surprise for Wood Turner Sister Audrey Steff

“When a friend of mine asked if she could put a bowl I had turned into her county library’s art show I thought to myself: why not?” said wood turner Sister Audrey Steff. “Little did I expect to be awarded first place in the wood division!”

Sister Audrey began turning wood in the 1970s. She does it in her free time and has created many beautiful pieces through the years. A first place in the wood division was well-deserved. The juried show took place at the Henderson Memorial Public Library in Jefferson, OH. The creation was a natural edged pear bowl turned from the wood of a tree on one of the community’s properties.

Athena Award

Joan Chittister received the Athena Leadership Award at a luncheon Thursday, October 12. This award comes from the city of Erie’s chapter of the international Athena organization, which is a non-profit organization that seeks to support, develop and honor women leaders. Sister Joan told the crowd of nearly 300 that gains have been made, but equality is still a long way off as long as women face violence, harassment, and the wage gap. “She has spoken out for women all over the world on behalf of peace, women’s issues, church renewal and human rights,” said Linda Stevenson, Athena PowerLink chairwoman and Athena Erie founder. “Her willingness to take on anybody in defense of women’s and humans’ rights exemplifies the courageous acts and fierce advocacy that is at the center of the Athena leadership model.” Sister Joan said she was honored to accept the award and thrilled by the energy of the women and men in the room.
PNC Check Presentation

On behalf of PNC and the PNC Foundation, James Stevenson, PNC Regional President, made a visit to Mount St. Benedict Monastery to present a $20,000 gift to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and St. Benedict Child Development Center. The grant has made it possible to purchase new hospital beds/mattresses and recliner chairs for the sisters who require health care at Mount St. Benedict Monastery.

Through their participation in the PA Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program (EITC) the St. Benedict Center Pre-Kindergarten program will have the funds necessary to financially assist the children who do not meet the qualifications of state and federal programs. On hand to accept the award are pictured from left: James Stevenson, PNC Regional President, Sister Anne Wambach, OSB, Prioress and Sister Mary Jane Vergotz, OSB, Development Director.

INSPIRATION

May Enrichment Series: Welcoming the Stranger

Who is the stranger? What does it mean to welcome the stranger and open ourselves to the presence of God? These are just two of the questions that Katie Eichenlaub White answered as presenter in the Enrichment Series at Mount St. Benedict Monastery on May 31.

“The stranger is the ‘other,’ said White, an ordained clergy person who serves in pastoral ministry through Crossroads Community Baptist Church of Erie. “To be hospitable means to accommodate others and their differences and diversity no matter what the race, the nationality, the religion.

“There is something of God to be discovered in each and every person. We must be willing to walk with the stranger, to converse, to listen, to share experiences. Every person is made in the image and likeness of God. Every person has something to share.”

Annual Community Retreat: Shaped by the end you live for

Bonnie Thurston, poet, author and theologian, led the community’s annual retreat, June 5-10, with the eye of the scholar and the heart of a poet. The theme was “Shaped by the end you live for.”

Thurston, a Merton Scholar and the founding member and a past president of the International Merton Society, as well as a New Testament Scholar, re-visited Thomas Merton’s thought on fundamental aspects of monastic spirituality and practice. She included the desert origins of monastic spirituality, the monk’s “creative consent” or fundamental “yes,” the place of solitude in community life and Merton’s teachings on prayer.

Mid-Life / Long Life Retreat

The September 2017 Mid-life/Long-life Retreat was such a worthwhile experience that the presenters, Sister Rosanne Loneck and Kathleen Kutz, will be making it available in 2018 on two different weekends: Mary 18-20, and September 8-9. Sixteen participants from Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas participated in the 2017 retreat and the most common comment of those participating was: “The weekend was a wonderful experience; it was just what I needed.” Mark your calendar now for a weekend experience to refocus in the midst of life’s changes with a Mid-Life/Long-Life Retreat for Personal and Spiritual Growth for Adults. For more information and registration details go to https://www.eriebenedictines.org/spirituality.
The Loving Search for God

The Loving Search for God retreat, a collaborative effort sponsored by Erie Contemplative Outreach, Saint George Parish, Our Lady of Mercy Parish, the House of Prayer, and the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, drew a group of more than 100 participants to Mount St. Benedict Monastery. It was a group united in a common desire: to learn more about contemplation and centering prayer. The retreat was directed by William Meninger, OSCO, a Trappist monk, prolific author, and retreat leader. Father Meninger is one of three principal architects of the Centering Prayer movement with Abbot Thomas Keating (now retired) and Father Basil Pennington (d. 2005) rounding out the trio.

October Enrichment Series:

When the End is the Beginning: Walking the Camino de Santiago

When Carol Vaccariello, an oblate with the Erie Benedictines and an ordained minister serving Disciple of Christ, United Church of Christ and Creation Spirituality communities, reached the end of the Camino walk she realized it was not the end for her. “What I learned from this amazing experience is that the end is the beginning.”

In the October Enrichment Series at Mount St. Benedict Monastery Carol shared her experience of the Camino de Santiago, or Way of St. James, the pilgrimage to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia in north-western Spain. Over the years the Camino has developed into a vibrant hub of Spanish culture that attracts pilgrims from all over the world.

“I really couldn’t answer the question as to why I took this journey until it was finished. I finally understood that it was meant to get me ready for the next part of my life.”

Reflecting the Image of God: The Challenge of Racism Today

“Difference is not dangerous; difference is Divine,” said Dr. Diana Hayes, featured speaker for the Erie Benedictines’ recent community weekend. “Our differences come from God; God created all in God’s image.”

Throughout her career, Dr. Hayes, Emerita Professor of Systemic Theology at Georgetown University (retired), has lectured extensively on issues of race, class, gender and religion, womanist and Black theologies, women in the Catholic Church, and African American Religions. In her time with the community and its oblates she shared her insights on the challenge of racism today by exploring the history of racism in the United States, including Christianity’s role in its evolution, its persistent presence today, and white privilege and its ongoing impact.

Wills and Estate Planning Seminar

Sister Anne Wambach, OSB, Prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, and sisters welcomed more than twenty individuals into their home at Mount St. Benedict Monastery on October 11 for a Wills and Estate Planning Seminar presented by Estate Planning Atty. Shaun B. Adrian of MacDonald Illig Attorneys. According to Dr. Emma Lee McCloskey, Director of Major and Planned Giving for the Benedictine Sisters and organizer of the event, “We were thrilled with the sizable response to the sisters’ invitation to visit with them at the Mount and learn about this topic.”

For a free copy of Atty. Adrian’s handouts on Wills and Estate Planning, or for information on future seminars, call Dr. McCloskey at 814-899-0614, ext 2415 or email her at elmccloskey@mtstbenedict.org.
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.

The Alliance for International Monasticism (AIM USA) is an organization of approximately 115 Benedictine / Cistercian Monasteries of women and men in the United States and Canada and over 400 communities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America who follow the Rule of Benedict. AIM USA provides spiritual, educational, formation and building assistance to monasteries in developing countries to enable them to be centers of life for others.

Federation Council Meets at the Mount

Sister Anne Wambach and the Erie Benedictines hosted the fall Federation of St. Scholastica Council meeting at Mount St. Benedict Monastery. The Federation of Saint Scholastica is comprised of 20 Monasteries of Benedictine Women and functions, through its chapter, president and council, to preserve and interpret the spiritual heritage according to Benedictine tradition as it is embodied in its Monastic Constitution. Council members include (L-R): Sisters Susan Quaintance, first councilor (Chicago), Mariacarmen Bracamontes (Torreon, Mexico), Rita Brink Covington, KY), Kathleen White (Lutherville), who joined the group for the meetings as recording secretary, Lynn McKenzie, Federation President (Cullman, AL), Elizabeth Brown (Glendora, CA), Kathleen McNany, secretary (Lutherville, MD) and Anne Wambach, treasurer (Erie).

Streambank gets a new look

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie applied for and were awarded a $140,000 Penn State Sea Grant (https://seagrant.psu.edu/) from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection’s Growing Greener Program to restore a stretch of Seven-Mile Creek which runs through property belonging to the Erie Benedictines and empties into Lake Erie. Sister Pat Lupo, environmental advocate and educator, has been integrally involved in the project which is now complete. Several months of work aimed at countering the effects of erosion by widening and strengthening 500 feet of a streambank buffer has greatly improved the streambank and restoration monitoring to improve fish habitat, water quality and the reduction of sedimentation entering the stream is in place.
From the Director

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

By Ann Comstock, Oblate

Upcoming Special Event: Mark your calendars now!

When the Sisters of St. Benedict arrived in Erie to begin their mission of educating young women, they could not possibly have envisioned the changes that would take place in the future. Since that time, their mission and ministries have adapted to the changing needs of the Benedictine community and the communities they serve.

It was those changing needs that led the sisters to face a very difficult decision, the closing of St. Benedict Academy in 1988. Although there were other schools to meet the need of educating young women and men, very little was being done to provide services for the inner-city. The sisters decided to adapt their mission to provide for the needs of immigrants, the disadvantaged, and especially, the children of Erie.

Throughout these changes, the SBA Alumnae Association remains one of the primary supporters of the Benedictine Sisters and their inner-city ministries. Each year they contribute to the Annual Alumnae Appeal, attend functions whose proceeds are channeled to various inner-city ministries and participate as volunteers at the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, Emmaus Soup Kitchen and other inner-city programs run by the Erie Benedictines.

The 2018 Spring Luncheon, scheduled for Saturday, May 26, will be a celebration of all that has been accomplished in the 30 years since the Academy closed and became the St. Benedict Education Center. The liturgy at the monastery on the following Sunday, May 27, will be in thanksgiving for all of the alumnae and sisters who are part of this amazing group of women who by working together have transformed the lives of so many. Without a doubt the SBA SPIRIT is still going strong!

Reunions

Classes 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 our 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.

Saturday, May 26, 2018
Spring Luncheon
Ambassador Conference Center
7792 Peach Street
Erie, PA
Vendor Shopping: 9:30 am to 12:30 pm
Lunch: 12:30 pm
Cost: $25

Saturday, May 26, 2015
St. Benedict Education Center – formerly St Benedict Academy
330 East 10th St
Erie, PA
Open House: 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Sunday, May 27, 2018
Mount St. Benedict Monastery
6101 East Lake Road
Erie, PA
Liturgy: 9:30 am
Social: 10:30 am to 11:30 am
Class of 1967 Reunion

Fifty six ladies from the SBA Class of ’67 gathered together on Saturday, July 8, to celebrate their 50th Reunion. It didn’t take long for everyone to re-establish friendships, join together, and spend the evening reminiscing and catching up on their current lives.

They enjoyed watching a DVD of photos from the high school years, alumnae functions, past reunions, and class events. Two lucky ladies took home a designer purse, and one, a matted print of the Academy, signed by all of those in attendance.

A table with the senior photos of deceased classmates, lighted candle and a dozen roses commemorating the flowers carried by everyone at graduation was how the group remembered the 23 members of their class who had passed away.

On Sunday, July 9, the reunion continued at Mount St. Benedict Monastery with mass, hospitality and refreshments provided by the sisters. A special treat was the company of Sister Mary Grace Hanes and Sister Mary Louis Eichenlaub, beloved former faculty members of St. Benedict Academy.

It was a memorable event, and everyone who attended agreed that it would be good to get together sooner rather than waiting for the next reunion in five years. They will continue their annual picnic, scheduled next year for Wednesday, August 8, at Glenwood Park. In the meantime, they will continue their support of the Alumnae Association by attending events such as the Christmas Party and Spring Luncheon.

If you do not receive class e-mails, and wish to be added to our Class of ’67 list, please send your address to Janet Romanowicz Hammond at hammondjanet@hotmail.com to receive future notices of events.

Class of 1982 Reunion

SBA class of 1982 celebrated their 35th class reunion on Saturday, September 9, 2017 at Jr’s On the Bay. There were 31 classmates and 7 guests in attendance. The unanimous report – “We had a wonderful time”!
SBA ALUM SHARE THEIR MEMORIES

Reflections, memories and thoughts from several alums were shared on the SBA pages in the Spring/Summer 2017 issue of The Mount. Their topic centered on the difference the Benedictine Sisters made in their lives, the values that keep them strong and the spirit that makes the SBA Alumnae Association the dynamic group that it is. As promised, here are more of their responses.

“With friends we never can Forget” What a perfect motto! My mom, Margaret Schloss-Whitby 39, my sister, Marybeth Whitby-Veshecco ’73 and myself, Sheila-Whitby-Anderson ’82 all had/have friends from SBA that we regularly get together with and consider family. I know of no other high school that still fosters these relationships like SBA. When I tell people that I still have many high school friends and we regularly meet, including our annual Christmas party, they are amazed! Thank you SBA. I treasure you still. Sheila Whitby-Anderson ’82

The year was 1928 and six young ladies entered St. Benedict Academy. They graduated four years later and this band of young women carried with them a good education and more than that, the spirit of the academy. The Alumnae Association was the glue that held them together as they traveled down life’s road, with all of its twists and turns. They attended card parties and communion breakfasts, worked rummage sales and festivals, all in the spirit of St. Benedict. My mother, Dolores Liebel, was one of these women and she instilled that spirit of the alumnae in me from a very young age – to live life with a compassionate heart and a giving spirit. Fast forward to 1966 and I graduated and walked into a very different world but filled with the same fervor that my mother had in 1932 and gifted to me. Even though I have spent all of my adult life away from Erie, I come home each year for the SBA Christmas party. When this band of 400 plus women stand and sing the school song, I realize that the words of this song and my mother’s example have guided me through all the days of my life. I will forever be grateful to the Academy, the Alumnae and most of all, my mother. Mary Margaret Pfister Joswig ’66

I feel so blessed that my dear mother insisted that I follow my sister’s footsteps and attend SBA. THE MOUNT magazine helps me to stay in touch with the SBA happenings and the various events and luncheons in which we are invited to partake. Also I become aware of opportunities to volunteer in the inner-city that make me feel, in a small way, that I can make a difference. The influence of the SBA approach will stay with me always. Marilyn Bowers ’65

I graduated from SBA in 1957. When I applied for my first job two days after graduation, my employer asked where I went to high school. I replied “SBA”. I was hired on the spot. It was the same over the next twenty years…one only hired SBA graduates. SBA has been a part of my life for 65 years. It is where I learned tolerance, love, empathy, compassion, giving and the spirit of God that is with me today. Adrienne Cunningham Manning ’57

Nuns. Hated school until I went to SBA in 1955. Learned to love learning in an environment where I felt I could do anything. It was never expressed in words by our teachers but it was communicated to us by their lives as smart, competent and ever so kind and patient women. Forensics and debate team. Maybe I’ll become a lawyer. English class and Tolstoy. Live the gospels, not just preach them. Perhaps a social justice advocate and a better Christian. Sports and class parties equalled cooperative learning, smiles, development of interpersonal skills and laughter. Fun. Accepting peers. Actually SBA must have enrolled the nicest girls in Erie. Life was “wonder-ful!” To this day the only emotion that I feel when I think of my SBA experience is WOW, how lucky I was. Elaine Vladimiroff Retzlaff ’59

I often reminisce about my days at St Ben’s – as we called our school – as some of the best times from my youth. The days in high school and the assignments were not easy, but I grew to appreciate the type of education I received and have been grateful for to this day. I moved to different parts of the country over the years and was blessed to experience responsible and challenging administrative positions in the work place due to the caring of the faculty and the knowledge imparted at St Ben’s. I was also motivated to continue studying and was able to eventually receive my B.A. degree. I attribute my interest in learning and the discipline involved to the study skills I received early on. I admire the continuing work that the sisters do in the community and am very proud to be part of the Alumni of St. Benedict Academy, Class of 1963. Barbara Pohl Brinkman ’63
Ever since the Neighborhood Art House has been having the Art and Sole race it has given me an excuse to get in shape. I start in January or February so by the time the race date is here I am ready to walk. I cannot walk fast but each time I join in it is so much fun. Last year my family raced as a team and did very well. Each time I am with the St. Benedict Alum I feel very lucky to be included in such a great group of women. Another reason I am glad I graduated from St. Benedict Academy is that Sister Mary Philip taught us how to sew. I am still sewing. Making quilts is my main hobby.  

**Carol Fischer Kuna ’56**

SBA was the most constant event in my life in the 9 years I lived in Erie. The impact of the education and community of a small school has had a lasting effect on the many, many choices I had to make once high school was over. There was an aura of kindness, a memory of someone forgiving me of a misdeed, the steady guidance brought carefully and persistently by the sisters and lay staff…all nudging me in my personal life, and impacting my career path on the importance of making a positive difference. I give full credit to the kind and authentic spirits of the Benedictine Sisters who continue to not only display the distinguishing characteristics of love, energy and humanity, but also continue to have an effect, to matter and to change outlooks for so many in need of their selfless offerings. Special thanks to Sister Mary David…no one quite understands why I need to listen to classical music REALLY, REALLY LOUD! And Sister Placid, I speak French much better now…but keep my English to French phrase book handy…Mrs Kohlmiller, you had the patience of Job, and the kindness of a saint, and of course, Sister Anthony…you took what tiny talent I had and have doomed me to a life of seeing the art in everything…to refinishing furniture, making stained glass windows, planting gardens, painting on canvas, cutting old clothes and recreating new garments, designing greeting cards…All your fault…and I thank you…!!!  

**Evelyn Schultz Mihok ’66**

**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.
Please help us to maintain an accurate mailing list and keep our costs down by contacting us with any change in mail or email information. If you prefer not to receive *The Mount* please let us know. Send correspondence to: Ann Comstock, Benedictine Sisters Development Office, Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA 16511, (814) 899-0614, ext. 2573, sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org

Christmas reminds us that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Christmas reminds us that Jesus leads to fullness in God.

In Jesus God offers the gifts of passion for truth, courage for good, desire for beauty.

We invite you to join us in a celebration of gratitude:

Christmas Liturgy, Monastery Chapel Christmas Eve at 8:30 p.m. and Christmas Day at 9:30 a.m.

May you know the peace and joy of this holy season.