Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine...

(Ephesians 3:20)
What Sparks Your Imagination?

What does it take to spark your imagination? For me, it can be any number of things. Sometimes it is a book I am reading; other times it is a photo, a beautiful summer day, a song or a memory. No matter what the spark, I have found imagining to be enlivening. While for some, imagination may simply be a form of entertainment, for me imagination is an invitation.

The stories and news shared on the pages of this issue of The Mount showcase the power of imagination. You will see how imagining has the power to bring new things into being. You will notice that when imagination and excitement are mixed together obstacles diminish and courage abounds. You will find that while imagination is the capacity to envision that which is not, it is also the capacity that transforms us to be able to “empathize with humans whose experience we have never shared.” (J.K. Rowling)

Some people think we need magic to change our world. I think we need imagination. Coupled with the grace of God, our imagination will help us to do more than we ever thought possible. As Benedictines who commit ourselves to be a healing presence and prophetic witness of peace, we offer an image to the world. We embrace the invitation to see what is possible embedded in what is real and then we do something: we respond. We plant seeds through words, actions and inspiration; we hope for them to grow.

Whether it is seeking God in community and responding in prayer and ministry, embracing a new adventure or answering the voice that calls one to become a Benedictine, an oblate or a member of Monasteries of the Heart; whether it is by taking advantage of volunteer opportunities or having our voices heard in places where people fear to speak; whether it is reaching out to those in need or offering hospitality and welcome—we pray to open ourselves to our full potential and freely respond so that God working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

So, what sparks your imagination? How does imagination invite you to something new? How does imagination enliven your heart? Maybe it will be a sound or a word or an image or a fragrance. Maybe it will be the Benedictine Sisters of Erie!

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Imagination is the voice of daring.
If there is anything Godlike about God it is that.
God dared to imagine everything.

Henry Miller

Cover Photo: Jo Clarke, Oblate
Though originally released over forty years ago, these lyrics continue to inspire, encourage and motivate people like us to hold fast to the dream of a peace-filled world — a world without the divisions created by national borders, narrow religious beliefs and the lure of materialism.

These dreams are more than the imaginings of the young and the idealistic: How can any of us ever lose hold of our dreams of world peace, of all the world’s people sharing resources without greed?

There is no simple solution to finding the peace that has eluded humankind generation after generation, but Gandhi gave us a clue when he said, “You must be the change you want to see in the world.” In Gandhi’s words, we must imagine and live these powerful dreams in our own lives, in our part of the world, and live them into existence for all parts of the world.

One individual who gave witness to “being the change” is Martin Luther King, Jr. His nonviolent resistance to oppression and segregation proclaimed the justice and mercy of God and helped many of us to imagine a new world. His famous “I Have a Dream” speech envisioned a world redeemed by the transforming power of God’s love and the promise of equality.

Margaret Mead’s famous quotation also reaffirms this idea: “Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” The message of Jesus started with a small group and spread by word of mouth and example — somewhat amazingly, especially if we compare it to the instantaneous communication of our day. How did it survive, thrive, and spread throughout the world? And then, how did it endure for centuries after the initial fervor and the death of the first disciples and followers?

We’ve heard all about the early days of the Christian communities in the scripture readings during the weeks of Easter, Pentecost and now into the “ordinary time” of summer. Perhaps those readings can help us catch the Spirit and keep our imaginings alive and, maybe, even turn our dreams into reality. For we know that everything is possible with God.

Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie

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From the Prioress

_Imagine all the people
Living life in peace…_

_Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger…_

_Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world…_

_You may say I’m a dreamer
But I’m not the only one
I hope someday you’ll join us
And the world will be as one._

— John Lennon, “Imagine”
CRM: Catholic Rural Ministry

To Be a Compassionate Presence

“The sisters are here,” was the chant that reached the ears of Sisters Phyllis Schleicher and Mary Hoffman when they arrived in McKean and Potter counties 14 years ago to begin Catholic Rural Ministry (CRM). “We didn’t know what to expect,” said Sister Phyllis, “but what we have received has far surpassed anything we could have imagined.”

It all started in 1999 when Msgr. Charles Kaza, vicar of the Eastern Vicariate, requested the permanent presence of religious women in the most northeastern corner of the Erie diocese. Sisters Phyllis and Mary, well versed in the Rule of the Benedict and its mandate, “Listen with the ear of the heart,” (RB, Prologue) did exactly that: They listened and responded with excitement when former Bishop Trautman urged them “to go and be a compassionate presence among the people.”

“We became pioneers,” chuckles Sister Mary. “Who would have thought that two religious women in the second half of their lives would start a new ministry?” While that may seem unusual to some, it is not unusual to Benedictines. From their founding more than 150 years ago, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have responded to the needs of the people. Sisters Phyllis and Mary did what Benedictines do: respond to the signs of the times with courage and conviction, steadfast faith and ever-abiding hope. And Catholic Rural Ministry was born.

The Ministry

Through prayer, presence and programs the sisters have reached out to the people in this rural area. First, they shared their prayer life: “As Benedictines we pray the Liturgy of the Hours daily, specifically Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. It is not unusual for a neighbor or two to respond to our invitation and join us. Together we pray; together we are community,” Sister Phyllis explains. “Often we have faith sharings in our home,” adds Sister Mary.

Hospitality in their home has been part of the sisters’ outreach from day one. In addition to their home being a place of prayer it has been a place of welcome to children, youth and adults. The sisters host children preparing for First Eucharist along with their parents, and youth who want to learn about vocations. Women seeking guidance and encouragement engage in reflection days there and have the opportunity to share what is important to them. “We listen to hopes and dreams; we provide a safe environment. We do our best to offer comfort and encouragement,” says Sister Phyllis.

Each day is a new adventure. “We never know what a phone call will bring. Sometimes the first call of the day is a person or family in great need; sometimes it is to notify us of the death of a neighbor or member of one of our parishes. It doesn’t really matter,” says Sister Phyllis. “Each day is new and we simply respond as best as we are able in being a compassionate presence in any and all situations.”

This response includes visiting the sick and the homebound, checking in on families suffering hardship, listening to people’s stories. Connecting and providing support is the root of the sisters’ outreach; listening and offering hope is their mainstay. “The people talk with us about the suitable jobs and decent homes for which they hope. They share their worry about children and family members who seem to have lost their way. It is very humbling,” comments Sister Mary. “But as the adage goes, ‘There isn’t anyone you couldn’t love once you’ve heard their story.’”

Spreading the Good News

It is no secret that evangelization is a key component of CRM. “It becomes ever clear to us that the people to whom we minister desire to have a meaningful spiritual life; they want to know the Gospel,” says Sister Phyllis.

In everything they do, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ is a priority for Sisters Phyllis and Mary. Their enthusiasm for the Gospel reaches out and touches the people they serve. It becomes obvious that evangelization is a way of living more than a way of speaking. In them the people to whom they minister find inspiration and support.
CRM serves 13 parishes and missions in this rural area of the diocese which means regularly traveling many miles in all kinds of weather. While this in itself can be challenging, both Sisters Phyllis and Mary agree that the bigger challenge is meeting the needs of so many people. Nevertheless, they have not wavered in their commitment to maintain the compassionate presence to which they have been called. One of their goals is to support parish communities spiritually and holistically. In an area where priests are stretched and have the responsibility of attending to the sacramental life of the faithful in many parishes at the same time, Sisters Phyllis and Mary are present for the people when the priests are unable to be there. They visit homes and nursing homes with a message of faith and hope. They share the message of Jesus: “You are loved.” They receive great satisfaction in sharing Benedictine community life, faith, conversation and help with those whom they serve. “We know we are making a difference in this area,” said Sister Mary.

Corporate Commitment

Entrusted with the Corporate Commitment of the Erie Benedictines to “be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace... especially for women and children,” Sisters Phyllis and Mary have prioritized ministry to women. One of the ways they share this priority is through regular Reflection Afternoons for women. Both Sisters Phyllis and Mary are excited about the success of these events. Between 15 and 25 women travel from Port Alleghany, Coudersport, Smethport and Kane to participate in the “themed” gatherings. There is always a new theme. Recently the afternoon was entitled, “Putting the Pieces Together.” Guided by the sisters the women reflected on the theme: “What pieces of life’s puzzle are you holding and are they the ones needed for happiness?”

In a world where day-to-day life can be very busy, this opportunity to slow down and be nurtured through sharing faith and ideas helps the women “grow their spirituality” and become more aware of God in their everyday life. When the afternoon is over they leave refreshed and ready to share the blessings they received. “I am always touched by the gratitude the women express for this opportunity that we provide,” says Sister Mary. “I am glad they leave with grateful hearts. One thing I have learned for certain is that gratitude is transformative. When we live with an attitude of gratitude we are able to see life differently.”

At the same time the sisters are equally committed to reaching out to the children and youth of the area. They are challenged to find creative ways to mobilize spirituality in youth, the future of the church. The sisters encourage young people to become lectors, servers and participants in the church’s music ministry to foster in them a sense of belonging. They also provide vocation awareness programs. “The programs are designed to help youth respond with wisdom and discernment to a vocation of service and life-long commitment to the church,” said Sister Mary. Parents and grandparents, those who can support and encourage vocations to religious life and the priesthood, are also invited to attend.

The Garden

Feeding the soul is not the only feeding the sisters do. The approach of summer signals the arrival of one of their favorite pastimes: Gardening! Sometimes with the help of neighbors, they maintain a large vegetable garden. Both Sisters Phyllis and Mary love to watch and nurture the growth of their plants and vegetables. The garden’s fruitfulness provides a foundation for their meals; it also allows them to give produce to area families. Often, after making a delivery, they hear children say to their mothers, “We will have something good to eat tonight.”

Growing CRM has been a lot like gardening for Sisters Phyllis and Mary. When seeds are planted who really knows what will grow? Sometimes it is exactly what is expected; other times it is a surprise. CRM has given them the opportunity to plant and nurture many seeds of faith, hope and love in a rural community that has responded to their love and care and come to depend on their kindness and “compassionate presence.” They have been enriched by their experiences and enlivened by this ministry. “We don’t pretend to have all the answers but what we do know is this: God is at work in us and others will reap the benefits of what we have begun,” says Sister Phyllis.

CRM is an outreach sponsored by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Erie. Diocesan funding, grants and donations help this ministry to continue. The prayers and financial generosity of benefactors provide needed support.
In 2007 CRM launched a foundation in Clarion and Venango counties and Erie Benedictine Sister Marian Wehler responded to the call to expand CRM in the diocese. Sister Clair Beichner, SSJ, was Sister Marian’s co-worker until she was elected to leadership in her community. In 2012 Sister Tina Geiger, RSM, took up the ministry. In the following interview Sister Marian, now in her sixth year of Catholic Rural Ministry (CRM), shares some of her thoughts and feelings about this work.

What drew you to CRM?
I remember being drawn to rural ministry back in 1999 when we were invited to imagine what it could look like in our diocese. Having grown up in St. Marys, PA, a rural area, I knew I would bring to this ministry an understanding of people whose culture and love for country life and nature is strong.

In 2005, as I was just finishing three years of ministry with two small parishes in Jefferson County, this new opportunity appeared. Sisters Phyllis and Mary (see pages 4–5) had made a great impact on the hearts of the people and priests of our diocese in Potter and McKean counties and Msgr. John Swoger (pastor of St. Joseph and Assumption Church in Oil City and Vicar of the western area of the Erie diocese) was eager to bring sisters to an area that was experiencing discouragement from the economic decline. I inquired about the job description and his answer was simple: “Women of Hope.”

What does the ministry entail?
In the very beginning it was important to get to know the people and pastors in the 19 parishes that comprise the Oil City Deanery. This included key leaders, Catholic school staff and religious educators. After that the ministry simply unfolded and grew naturally.

It wasn’t long before we were invited to give reflection and retreat days to various groups: Rosary societies and confirmation and sacramental groups, to name a few. One young mom asked if we had anything to offer for new mothers. As a new mother herself she knew her spirituality was changing rapidly. Before we knew it, MOMS (Ministry of Mothers Sharing) was off and running. Now we have two MOMS groups and our meeting is usually a night out for dinner with relevant discussion topics.

We have also helped Bible Study groups get started. There is such a hunger among the people to know and understand the scriptures so they can live them more fully. These groups have been very successful and have spawned deep friendships among the members.

Do you work with any particular agencies or facilities?
Early on a relationship was established with St. Elizabeth Center, an affiliate of Catholic Charities in the Erie Diocese. It is a community food pantry, clothes closet and thrift shop all in one. Sister Tina works closely with the staff at St. Elizabeth and CRM receives many referrals and requests for emergency assistance. Being available to answer calls and make referrals is a significant part of the ministry. As St. Benedict says, a kind word is possible in every situation.

I remember one night, after an especially long day, the phone rang. It was a mother who hadn’t had time or transport to go out and buy valentines for her young daughter to take to school the next day. At first, I decided it was too late to go out looking for valentines but then something changed my mind and my heart. A quote from a discussion booklet I had been reading came to mind: “Every child is your child.” I went out and found some valentines for that little girl.

Also, there is a large State Correctional Institution in Forest County that houses more than 2,000 inmates. Its location in the Alleghany Forest limits the availability of resource people to offer programs to the men. CRM works to provide spiritual enrichment programs. Monasteries of the Heart, a monastic movement for lay people designed to respond to the great hunger and thirst for spirituality that exists in today’s...
world, has been a wonderful resource. And Sister Tina teaches Centering Prayer there. I can’t tell you how appreciative the men are. They tell us that during our time with them, they don’t feel like they are in prison.

**What do you enjoy most about the ministry?**

I love the creativity the ministry calls for each and every day. Imagining new and exciting ways to connect and inspire and help someone is always pulling me forward. Sister Tina and I begin the day together with grateful prayer for the people we encountered the previous day and the special gifts of God’s providence. A calendar review follows but the Spirit is definitely in charge.

We might be asked to lead a Communion Service for someone who fell ill or take someone to a doctor’s appointment in an emergency. We might have to plan a Confirmation retreat for 40 youth and their parents. Creative thinking, creative planning and creative time management are crucial. But, at the end of the day, I would have artifacts for one of their yearly mission fairs. Children at St. Stephen’s School in Oil City gave me letters and warm jackets to take to orphans in Kenya when I visited that country last year. St. Joseph’s students in Lucinda sent books to a rural school in the African bush. For me, it’s exciting and satisfying to bring a global perspective to rural youth and see the kids grow and mature from year to year. The youth are the future and their hopeful attitudes give me hope.

**What is your biggest challenge in CRM?**

The worry about having sufficient funds to maintain the ministry is often a challenge for me. Each year the diocese provides about 40% of our income. Writing grants and hoping that each year our finances will balance is not something I relish. Yet, it is a learning experience. God must want us here because so far, we’ve always found enough. Sometimes a donation may barely cover a gas cost for a program; and then, a full month’s gas bill is covered by another donation.

To say the best part of the ministry is getting to know the people, hearing their stories, and connecting with them through different kinds of outreach and spirituality experiences. The school children loved it when I invited them for some involvement in the missions. St. Patrick’s School in Franklin borrowed all my African cloths and artifacts for one of their yearly mission fairs. Children at St. Stephen’s School in Oil City gave me letters and warm jackets to take to orphans in Kenya when I visited that country last year. St. Joseph’s students in Lucinda sent books to a rural school in the African bush. For me, it’s exciting and satisfying to bring a global perspective to rural youth and see the kids grow and mature from year to year. The youth are the future and their hopeful attitudes give me hope.

**Is there anything else you would like to tell our readers about CRM?**

Yes! Catholic Rural Ministry is much like any other ministry and relationship: it’s about presents and presence. I try to be present to the people I serve and I have found that it is their very presence that calls out the best in me. Every day is new and has its own “presents.” Sometimes it is the little child in a crowd who remembers us from our visit to their classroom and wants to share an exciting story with us; sometimes it is the tears we hear in a telephone conversation after assisting someone in distress; sometimes it is the hope people express when they find a listening heart.

Often the gift is in the inspiring things that I see and experience: the elderly who give of themselves so generously to parish projects; the faithfulness of volunteer catechists and food pantry helpers; the mother of an autistic child who has unfailing patience; an 80+ year old parish staff member who is still enthusiastic in her work for the church; a pastor who is grateful for a shared meal and conversation; a principal who can share her worries as well as her pride in students and staff; the patience of the inmates with a system that is impersonal . . . . I could go on and on. Suffice it to say, being involved in CRM is a wonderful gift for which I am very grateful. I give glory to God whose power at work has done more than I could have possibly imagined.
Day-to-day life has changed radically for two professional women who have moved into the monastery and begun a program of monastic formation to discern if God is calling them to become members of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. This initial stage of monastic formation, called postulancy, is a time to become more familiar with Benedictine life by participating in the daily rhythms of communal life, prayer and work.

Pat Witulski, a schoolteacher and a native of Buffalo, NY, followed the call of her heart and became a postulant in August 2012. She currently works at St. Benedict Education Center where she enjoys teaching refugees from Bhutan.

Jan Seeley, a Montessori teacher and a native of Rochester, NY, moved to Erie and began her postulancy in January 2013. In her current ministry, Jan works with small children at St. Benedict Child Development Center.

Like Pat and Jan, the women who enter religious life today are usually older and have more life experience and professional training than their counterparts who came to community fresh out of high school or college, the norm until a few decades ago. This reality creates a new diversity in membership that can be enriching as well as challenging. Traditional formation programs that catered to the educational and developmental level of women 18-20 years old do not fit the needs of the women entering communities today.

Today’s women who enter religious life often have had successful careers, have deep and strong spiritual lives, may have been involved with social issues and active in church or other communities. To help them integrate into community life with nearly 100 other sisters in the Erie community, as postulants they work 32 hours a week in their ministries and spend one day a week at the monastery devoted to prayer, reflection and study. They also participate in individualized classes on monastic prayer, liturgy, Scripture, Church, personality development and community living skills. Twice a year they gather with other new members of religious communities from the tri-state area for weekend workshops on spirituality. This is an opportunity to interact with men and women from different communities who are also discerning a vocation to religious life.

Recently I asked Jan and Pat to share some of their joys and challenges as they adapt to life at the monastery.

Here are their responses:

We celebrate everything in community with prayer and festivity, whether it is a birthday, holiday, or Benedictine feast day. We sing, we dance, we pray, we party. We are blessed with creative, beautiful liturgies and participate in schola, the community choir.

We have beautiful grounds conducive to contemplative prayer, long walks, and communion with God through nature. We have a boardwalk leading to a breathtaking view of Lake L to R: Sister Anne Wambach, prioress, Jan Seeley, Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Postulant Director, Sister Marilyn Schauble, Vocation Director

Jan Seeley, a Montessori teacher from Rochester, NY, became a postulant on January 27. “When I walked in the door and saw all the sisters there I felt as if I was seeing my future in front of me,” said Jan.
New Venture at Monasteries of the Heart

By Linda Romey, OSB

Sister Mary Ellen Plumb is used to giving retreats. She’s directed dozens for students and for adults. But the Monasteries of the Heart retreat she led for 24 deacons in Dallas, TX was a first for her and a new adventure, a new possibility for members of Monasteries of the Heart, a new monastic movement begun by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

“I was behind my desk in Erie and they were gathered in a meeting room in a retreat center 1,300 miles away,” she explained. “Skype brought us into the same space but our even deeper connection was a mutual interest in Monasteries of the Heart.”

The deacons, who minister throughout the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas, meet annually for a day of reflection and renewal. Their archdeacon, Jim Webb, has been an active member of Monasteries of the Heart for over a year and recently took part in the yearlong online course The Heart of the Rule on the website. This experience inspired him to ask Sister Mary Ellen, a member of the MOH support staff, to use the retreat day to introduce the MOH movement to the deacons in Dallas.

Sister Mary Ellen opened the retreat on Friday evening with an invitation, a presentation challenging the deacons to explore together through prayer and reflection some of the concepts captured in The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life, by Joan Chittister, the initial formation text for MOH members. The group went on to share a number of reflection sessions on Saturday led by Jim with excerpts from the book and reflection questions posed by Mary Ellen to provide the retreatants with a taste of the MOH experience.

The retreat day closed with a second session during which Mary Ellen facilitated a dynamic and engaging conversation, including questions and feedback.

Mary Ellen thanked the group during the opening session for their trust, for “treading new ground with all of us at Monasteries of the Heart with the very first Skype MOH reflection day,” she explained. “Skype proved more a bridge and not a barrier. You opened a new world to us, and we thank you for it.”

Such is the power of this new movement, Monasteries of the Heart, of the longing for a deeply meaningful life and of the gentle invitation all pilgrims share on their way to God.

Find out for yourself at monasteriesoftheheart.org

Erie, cottages on the lake, wooded areas with hermitages, and gardens with benches. We appreciate the gift of a weekly reflection day that gives us special time to nourish our body, mind and spirit through prayer, reading, study, creative leisure and exercise.

No longer having our own cars, we are learning to wait for the sisters in our carpool, find another ride if our schedule changes and sign out a car if we want to go out. The unexpected surprise of carpooling is the camaraderie that develops as we, in good humor, try to keep track of who rides where on which day.

We have been impressed by the humility of the sisters who make every effort to apologize and accept our apologies when misunderstandings occur.

An unexpected challenge was homesickness that comes with this transition. It is a dream come true to be here, yet there is a genuine grief that comes from leaving people and places that we love.

Adjusting sleep habits is not easy. We rise to be in chapel by 6:30 a.m. for Morning Prayer before we leave for ministry. If we were night owls before, we adjust to being morning birds now!

Perhaps the greatest challenge is balancing prayer, ministry, community life and personal time. We feel blessed to have some built-in structure to help make this possible, yet we are in a very active community which requires us to set our own boundaries and develop assertiveness skills which include saying “no” from time to time.

We are happy to be connected to such a courageous community of women who are willing to speak up and work for change on behalf of peace and justice in the Church and in the world.

More information about our Benedictine life and various ways to experience it is available at ErieBenedictines.org. Come as a guest, consider spending a year with us or inquire about becoming a postulant. We welcome you!
Winter and Spring Break Ministry Service Trips

By Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director

As Vocation Director, it is my privilege to host groups of college students interested in a monastic experience and curious about life in a monastery. Over the years the community has built relationships with several colleges who choose the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and our ministries as the destination for their alternative spring/winter break service trip.

For one week the students and their adult advisors live and work with the sisters, sharing in community prayer and meals, serving in Benedictine ministries and socializing with the community. The week also includes input sessions where the students learn the “why” behind monastic practices such as the Liturgy of the Hours, lectio divina, and engagement in social justice activities. I never cease to be touched by their comments when they share the most memorable moments for them about the experience and how the week expanded their vision of the world. These young adults are the future of our world; while their comments let us know they are better for having had this experience, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie are better for them having been here.

Here are some of their responses to my questions:

What was most memorable?

I made so many wonderful memories from my stay at the monastery...I loved the peacefulness and joy of the monastic way of life. I especially loved praying with the community every morning and evening; it really gave structure to the day. I have made more of a commitment to praying every morning and evening after experiencing prayer at the monastery. Before, sometimes morning prayer just wouldn't happen in the rush to get to school...but after experiencing monastery life where time was made for prayer, I see how essential it is to start and end the day with God.

-- Victoria Erdman (Student, Canisius College)

The week profoundly touched me and invited me to grow in faith. I always begin by explaining how Benedictines value hospitality and welcoming the other. I remember like it was yesterday walking into your sacred space for our prayer session and being awed by the beauty of the chapel. The light coming through the windows was breathtaking and the holy water sculpture drew me in to touch it. As I centered for prayer, I couldn't help but see how kind the sisters were to one another, especially to those elderly women who needed their assistance. It clearly was faith in action. I felt that our group was already a part of the community and not just guests spending a week there. Interesting that all that happened and we had not even left to work at our assignments yet.

-- Patti Grasso (Adult Advisor, Canisius College)
What helped you to see the world in a little different light?

One of the most eye opening things I did was work with the refugees at St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC). I helped two people learn to fill out paper work. When I volunteered for that ministry, I had no idea how difficult it would be. I take reading and writing English for granted. These people hardly knew how to write their own names. They could copy information from memorization, but they were hardly able to form the letters correctly. I was there to help them for one day, but what I showed them would influence their lives long after I left. I still wonder how those people are doing today.

–Kaley Prebonick (Student, Ohio Wesleyan/Kent State University)

I believe that my short time in Erie helped me see the importance of social justice in practicing my faith. Discussing issues of our world with the sisters inspired me to think about how my gifts might be useful in alleviating some of our global problems. The following summer, I spent four months working in a rural Central American town teaching English and I don’t know if I would have seen this as a practice in faith had it not been for the meaningful conversations I had with the sisters.

– Becca Norton (Adult Leader, Canisius College)

What was praying together with the community in the morning and evening like for you?

It was like sitting next to God. It really centered me, and made me focus. It helped me to see God in every little thing that happened in my life, good or bad. It was awesome, and I still pray each morning the daily prayer that the sisters post on their website.

– Drew Genco (Student, Canisius College)

Praying twice a day helped me to reflect and understand better what my goals were while being at the monastery as well as to find a purpose to what I was doing.

– Magdalena Jacobo (Student, Ohio Wesleyan University)

NEW vocation booklet available

A new vocation booklet is now available. Do you know a woman who is considering religious life? Give her one of these booklets—it might be just the encouragement she needs to listen to the call of her heart. The booklets are available from Sister Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director, vocations@mtsbenedict.org and on our community website (ErieBenedictines.org). Thank you for all you do to foster vocations to religious life.

What words would you use to describe the Benedictine Sisters of Erie that would help your friends and family know who we are and what we do?

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie are a welcoming, vibrant, friendly, peaceful, justice-filled group of women dedicated to loving the world and loving God.

– Colleen Waickman (Student, Ohio Wesleyan University)

The first word that comes to mind is “dedicated.” This is because the Benedictine Sisters of Erie are wholly dedicated to the improvement of their community and of themselves in their quest to follow God’s will. The second word is “welcoming,” as the Sisters treat any guest who comes to the monastery or seeks their assistance in the community as if he or she were Christ himself. Another phrase that I would use is “in solidarity” because the Benedictine community functions in such a way that each sister promotes the greater interest of the entire community in her actions, while the community remains focused on the singular goal that everybody shares.

– Brian Zylinski (Student, Canisius College)
Imagine a monastery without oblates? Impossible!

By Audrey Steff, OSB and Ann Hoffman, OSB, Oblate Directors

In a fractured world where many people lack significant and lasting connection with others, oblates of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery find connection—community—in meaningful relationships with the Benedictine sisters and other oblates. “Community is what draws me to the Benedictine way,” explained oblate Sharon Mosher on a recent visit to the monastery. “Community helps provide the spiritual foundation from which ministry to the poor is supported.”

Sharon, who became an oblate in 2011, and her husband Neil travel to Erie from their home in Burlington, Ontario about once a month to visit the monastery and volunteer at St. Benedict Education Center. They regularly attend the community’s scheduled gatherings, shared time that helps them stay connected with sisters and oblates. The Mosher’s also began a local Monastery of the Heart small community as a way to sustain and grow their commitment. “Our family and friends know how meaningful this Benedictine way of life is for us, how it has brought us more awareness of the world,” Sharon said. “They support us in this way of life.”

Imagine listening to people who need someone to validate their humanity. The opening mandate of the prologue of the Rule of Benedict:

Listen with the ear of the heart

takes on new meaning. It becomes the manner in which Benedictine hospitality and welcome are extended and a healing presence is shared.

“A friend of mine gave me an article by Erie Benedictine Joan Chittister that changed my life,” oblate Cheryl Bough said in explanation of her connection to a community across the country from her home in Fremont, CA. “Then I found the community website and followed it for several years before I came to Erie for the 2004 Holy Week retreat. What I found was a group of strong women who are centered in God and who have found their voice. I became an oblate.” A Benetvision Publications volunteer, Cheryl promotes the Joan Chittister Fund for Prisoners, helping to spread Benedictine spirituality to some of society’s most forgotten members. As Cheryl continues to listen to the voice of God in the world around her, she maintains her connection to the monastery with twice-a-year visits to Erie and many electronic and phone communications in-between.

Imagine, these women and men strengthened by their Benedictine community live the message of Benedict in their own homes, their workplaces, their neighborhoods and cities. Their commitment transforms the spaces around them into centers of peace. Little by little, walls are broken down as they welcome the stranger and model hospitality.

“I am drawn to the value that Benedictines place on strong, capable, educated, kind, compassionate, loving women and to the work the sisters do to help women become all that they can be for themselves and for their families, rooted in a deep spiritual relationship with God,” shared Kathy Stephens, an oblate for more than 20 years. For the last 13 years Kathy has worked at St. Benedict Education Center with poor women struggling to develop these skills to improve their lives and the lives of their families. Kathy’s pursuit of the monastic way of life also has had great impact on her family, as she explains, “We raised our sons and our daughter to value the gifts of women and the critical need for those gifts in today’s world. Our daughter and our daughters-in-law are such women, strong and gifted, successful in the workplace and wonderful parents.”

Oblates are those persons like Kathy, Sharon and Cheryl who strive to follow the Rule of Benedict through a formal commitment to a monastery; at Mount St. Benedict Monastery almost 300 oblates. Balance, zeal and moderation, qualities stressed in the Rule of Benedict, guide their everyday lives. As part of their commitment, they study the Rule, pray regularly and devote their time to help people and organizations in need. Our oblates are women and men who live in an extraordinary manner by their care and kindness, commitment and dedication. Imagine, in them, the sacredness of the ordinary truly becomes manifest.

For more information about becoming an Oblate of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, visit ErieBenedictines.org or contact us at oblates@mtstbenedict.org.
Nancy Sabol, Oblate:
2013 Woman of the Year Finalist

By Jo Clarke, Oblate

Oblate Nancy Sabol was one of five finalists for the Women’s Roundtable 2013 Woman of the Year Award. She was honored at the 26th annual banquet dinner held at the Sheraton Erie Bayfront Hotel on May 16. The Women’s Roundtable is a charitable networking organization for women entrepreneurs, professional women, and all women with strong interests in helping other women to attain their goals. The award honors a woman who has become a role model not only for young women and girls, but for all humankind.

Nancy is the Executive Director of Gannondale, a residential facility for girls with emotional and behavioral issues. Founded by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in 1934, Gannondale provides a safe place where young women can learn to grow and heal from the traumatic past they have experienced.

When asked if she thinks she’s made a difference, Nancy said: “I don’t know. I only know how humbled I am years later when a former resident calls and proudly announces that because of our support she is somebody. When a child can sleep in peace, if only for a few months; can live without fear, if only for a while; when a young woman can find help, and experience the quiet healing of therapy – is it worth it? All I can tell you is that I would do it all over again. There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie congratulate Nancy who, as an Oblate, clearly strives to live out our Corporate Commitment to “be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace by working for sustainability and justice, especially for women and children.”
Erie Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister has established an archival collaboration between the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Penn State University, and Mercyhurst University to preserve and make accessible her accumulated works. These three groups share a common desire to preserve the work of a woman described in a recent Penn State press release as “an internationally renowned writer and lecturer and one of the most articulate social analysts and influential religious leaders of this age.”

For more than 30 years, Sister Joan has dedicated herself to advocating for universal recognition of the critical questions impacting the global community, and she has received numerous awards and recognition for her work for justice, peace and equality, especially for women in church and in society.

Courageous, passionate and charged with energy, Sister Joan has written more than 50 books, over 700 articles and columns and received 12 honorary degrees and 13 Catholic Press Association awards for her work. She writes a regular online column, “From Where I Stand,” for the National Catholic Reporter newspaper and for The Huffington Post. She is a much-sought after speaker and commentator and currently serves as co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, a partner organization of the U.N. that facilitates a worldwide network of women peace builders. In this capacity, she has addressed interfaith gatherings in Egypt, Denmark, India, Lebanon, Taiwan, Switzerland, Norway, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Japan, Turkey, Australia, Kenya, and throughout the United States.

Sister Joan is a past prioress of the Erie Benedictine community and past president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, representing leaders of more than 57,000 Catholic women religious in the United States. She is a Distinguished Alumna with a doctorate in speech communications theory from Penn State University, a bachelor’s degree from Mercyhurst University and a master’s from the University of Notre Dame; she was an elected fellow of St. Edmund’s College, Cambridge University.
The Eberly Family Special Collections library, located in the main library complex at Penn State University, will be the chief repository of Sister Joan’s material that will now be organized, categorized and available to the public and for researchers through the professional and technological abilities of the Penn State archive department.

As their part in this collaboration, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie recently opened a permanent archive room at the monastery. Primary among the offerings is a display of all of Sister Joan’s books, memorabilia from her national and international involvements, samplings of her many awards and recognitions and, on a designated computer, electronic access to most of her articles, interviews and books.

“It is a special honor for us to pay this tribute to Sister Joan, our sister in community,” said Sister Anne Wambach, prioress. “Many of our guests, oblates and our own sisters will benefit from this access to Sister Joan’s life work — a work that has focused on issues of women, spirituality, peace, justice and religious life.” Sisters Mary Miller, Anne McGreevy, Margaret Zeller and Susan Doubet formed the committee that designed the archives room at the monastery. The generosity of supportive donors enabled the renovation of a front parlor to house the work.

Mercyhurst University’s participation includes hosting an annual speaker series in Sister Joan’s name and developing a permanent exhibition documenting her professional pursuits. Dr. Mary Hembrow Snyder, Mercyhurst Professor of Religious Studies and Director of the Center for Mercy & Catholic Studies, has been named coordinator of the Mercyhurst archives.
This September the Benedictine community honors seven jubilarians with great rejoicing. As Erie Benedictines, these women have been faithful to seeking God in the communal life and have responded in prayer and ministry: Sister Phyllis Weaver for 70 years; Sisters Mary Ellen Cummings, Claire Hudert, Pat Lupo, Annette Marshall and Marcia Sigler, each for 50 years; and Sister Therese Glass for 25 years. Each of these sisters is celebrated for her unique and special witness. They have been and continue to be gift to community, the church and the world.

Staying abreast of the latest discussions in theology and spirituality and on top of local and national news and current church and world events is very important to Sister Phyllis. “I read the newspaper every day, always listen to national news in the evening, and I plan on keeping my subscription to *NCR* (National Catholic Reporter) until I am no longer able to read.” This passion for awareness of the world around her gives Sister Phyllis an edge in recommending books and articles for the sisters. It is not unusual to be handed a news clipping, a highlighted article or a book title from Sister Phyllis with the simple greeting, “Thought you would enjoy this.”

Sister Phyllis met the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in her hometown of Sharon, PA, and entered the community in 1941, never looking back. As a Benedictine sister she has ministered primarily in the field of education: elementary and high school teaching and administration. Before taking over the Ministry of Hospitality at Mount St. Benedict Monastery from 1994-2010, Sister Phyllis was the Education Coordinator and Supervisor in Education Advocacy services at the Sarah Reed Center for 20 years. “I truly appreciate the different places I have been and ministries I have done through the years. They have all been uniquely wonderful opportunities.”

Strong community life has been one of the greatest gifts Sister Phyllis has received in her 70 years of monastic living. “Not being alone, taking advantage of the many ways to show care for my sisters, interacting with them daily at prayer, meals and through casual conversation, is what keeps me and my mind going. I am not alone and that is one of the most wonderful benefits of living together in community.”

Sister Phyllis is especially happy to now be engaged in the ministry of prayer and presence at the monastery. It fits in very well with what she considers to be one of the important things that has helped her to live in community for 70 years, “Be open to hearing others. Be willing to listen and accept the other. Be happy to work with each other. Pray for them, be present to them. It helps them and helps you, too.”
Mary Ellen Cummings

This 50th Jubilee is truly a monumental event in my life. The experiences and happiness that have been mine in these 50 years has far surpassed my imagination. Doing anything for 50 years is almost unheard of in our fast-paced society. Yet, living religious life for 50 years has been a special blessing for me.

It has been a gift to have loved every place I taught, every place I lived and every place I worked from North East to Oil City to Sharon to Fryburg to Franklin, PA. From a very young age, the idea of being a missionary was always in the back of my mind. That, too, became a reality when I was able to serve as a missionary with the Erie Diocesan Mission of Friendship in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico, for five years. The opportunity to work that closely with the poor of another culture changed my life forever. I came home from Mexico to work at Pax Christi USA, which had its own rewards, and then at St. Benedict Education Center as a caseworker, another work I truly loved. Now I am at the Neighborhood Art House with children from many cultures and they have found their way into my heart. I have learned that missionary work can be done right in our own backyard.

None of this would have been possible without the blessings of community life and my sense of humor that my Mom implanted in me and each of my brothers and sisters.

Benedictine monasticism has been a good fit for me since the day I entered. Daily prayer keeps me grounded and Eucharistic liturgy keeps me nourished. The Benedictine Sisters of Erie are a community of women that knows how to celebrate. This Jubilee is one more way to truly enter into a full, communal, spiritual celebration of each other’s lives. To celebrate with the community, with my family and with my friends will definitely increase my blessings a hundredfold.

“I have learned that kindness and caring are the first steps in the work of peace and justice.”

Claire Hudert

The blessings I have received through my vocation to serve God as a woman monastic have been more than I ever expected or imagined! So many surprises! The enormous amount of love, support and caring I have received from my community has empowered me to be and do so much.

And did I ever suspect that I would be gifted innumerable times to be involved in and involve others in prayer, both liturgical and informal? Who would imagine all these things for themselves? Certainly not me.

Looking back, it is clear that God has provided me with the experiences and preparation I needed for each of the ministries in which I have been involved. My various ministries have provided me with challenges and opportunities to show God’s love through my actions—in teaching, feeding, healing, listening, assisting, supporting, comforting. One of the things I am most grateful for in my life is that I have been called and have had the opportunity to provide direct service to many people. Although my work has sometimes been difficult, I can truly say that I have enjoyed the various ways that I have been able to offer service. Work has most often been a pleasure, and that is a rare gift.

I do believe God called me to religious life. Consequently, dedication to life in community and to ministry have been the source of joyful blessings throughout these many years. This jubilee provides an opportunity to share my joy on this occasion with all my sisters in community, with my family and with my friends. Together we will celebrate how immensely I have been blessed by God, loved by so many and empowered to bring good and happiness to others.

Ministry is simply love in action.”

Sister Claire Hudert has taught at the elementary, secondary and college levels. After serving as a Director of Religious Education she worked in the Erie Diocesan Mission of Friendship in Mérida, Yucatán, Mexico, where she taught basic reading and math to women with no educational opportunities. She also served as an associate director of the Mission Office for the Diocese of Erie. Currently she is chaplain at Polk State Center in Franklin, PA.

Sister Claire Hudert
Pat Lupo

Jubilee is a special and memorable time because it brings us together to celebrate life—a time to bring friends together—a time to recognize the breadth of religious life and its impact on the world, in our case as Benedictines, for over 1,500 years.

I am very grateful for the support of my religious community over the years. It was my Benedictine community that introduced an 18-year-old young woman to the age-old Benedictine concept, “Listen with the ear of your heart.” They challenged me to join the covenant people and to promote and model sacred actions: actions that spring from our faith traditions and from the Book of Creation. This Benedictine community enabled both my environmental and Central American ministries. I am the woman that I am today because of my many Benedictine mentors.

Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said, “Abba, as much as I am able, I practice a small rule, all the little fasts, some prayer and meditation, and remain quiet. As much as possible I keep my thoughts clean. What else should I do?” Then the old man stood up and stretched out his hands towards heaven and his fingers became like the torches of flames. And he said, “Why not be turned into fire?”

“I do what I do because I love it and believe it is our responsibility to care for the earth; to care for each other.”

Indeed—why not be turned into fire? And so, my passion for the environment and for my work in Central America, especially El Salvador, has led me down many wonderful and hard roads and has opened the doors to wonderful opportunities and lifelong friends and life-changing encounters.

Thomas Berry talks about the Great Work—we each have a Great Work to be about; each day we are called upon to act. Will our actions be sacred actions? Are we able to surrender to the story that is unfolding around us and to embrace the mystery and be a positive force in our communities, our neighborhoods, our world? “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has,” said Margaret Mead. Together we can make a difference; we have the power to heal our communities, to heal the planet. We must embrace our story and be about the Great Work.

Sister Pat Lupo has taught at the elementary, secondary and college levels, mainly in the area of science and environmental education. She led environmental programs at Glinodo Center and EarthForce, later Earth Action. She has served on local, regional and international environmental boards and received a number of awards for her environmental work. Sister Pat is involved in Central America outreach and has taken part in a number of accompaniment projects. Her present ministry is teaching at the Inner-city Neighborhood Art House.

Annette Marshall

It is unbelievable to me that I have reached a 50-year mark—I still feel like I am such a beginner! Jubilee is an opportunity to “get back to basics.” Life can get so busy, so fragmented, that it is easy to lose focus. Marking this 50th anniversary helps me to reflect on the core of who I am and what it means to be a Benedictine. Jubilees bring the community together to affirm our shared life. It is also an opportunity to gather my family. My jubilee will be memorable for me because these two essential parts of my life will be one in celebration.

Back in my high school days at St. Benedict Academy when I was pondering my future, I was struck by Sister Mary Philip and how happy she was. I remember thinking, “I want to be like that.” During the summer before I entered the community, my father would often remark that he didn’t see how I would be able to last since “each day will be just like the one before it. You’ll be bored!” Many years later I assured him that I was definitely not bored!

The many challenges that life as an Erie Benedictine has placed before me have pulled and stretched me in ways I could never have foreseen. The years of renewal in the ‘60s and ‘70s stripped away the superficial and brought me face to face with the core values of prayer, community and ministry. The call to social justice, so evident in the lives of the sisters and embraced with courage by the community, freed my spirit and opened my heart so that I, too, could reach out to others. The freedom to explore my interests and develop my talents as well as the faith that the community placed in me propelled me to embrace meaningful yet often uncertain roles within the community and in ministry. Most of all, living in this community has taught me that the joy and happiness I was seeking is really an expression of the love and support we offer to one another. Everyone must travel their own life’s journey; in community, we blaze the trail for one another.

Sister Annette Marshall taught a number of years in elementary school and then served as an elementary school principal for 10 years. Leaving elementary education, she became administrator at St. Benedict Academy. Sister Annette has held a number of other administrative positions including Director of Physical Resources at Mount St. Benedict and administrator of Glinodo Center. Presently, Sister Annette is the Executive Director of the Inner-city Neighborhood Art House. She is also a member of the Monastic Council.
Marcia Sigler

As I reflect on the 50 years since my first profession of monastic vows I probably would not have imagined having the strength to do some of the things I have done, especially those that required me to “step out of the box,” to take a stand on the edge or take on a new task. But with the strength of community, working and praying through good times and life challenges, I have done much more than I ever imagined I could do alone.

Community means so much to me. I have learned how to be strong and how to be weak, how to rejoice and how to mourn. I have come to understand that living in community is both miraculous and mystical. As sisters in community we are interconnected through the Rule of Benedict by which we live, the monastic vows that we promise, the charism we convey, the corporate commitment we uphold and the daily prayer in which we engage together. The psalms we chant each day speak to me and they often speak to me of the gift of community—the love of God made visible.

A short poem I wrote at a community weekend many years ago expresses for me the strength of community:

Flexible branches
Weaving in and around,
Supporting
Stretching — — — —
Coming to the center
Walking to the edge
Seeking together
Healing

Enabling
Being

I am looking forward to the Golden Jubilee. Just thinking about sharing the celebration with community, family and friends and recognizing that I didn’t make it this far alone fills me with the joy of anticipation. Each day the excitement mounts. As that happens, my gratitude for the many blessings that have been mine in these 50 years grows and deepens.

Sister Marcia Sigler ministered in elementary education for 20 years before moving into health care as a nurse aide at Hamot Hospital. After leaving Hamot she became a nursing assistant in the infirmary at Mount St. Benedict Monastery where she continues to minister. Sister Marcia also served as a volunteer EMT for Fairfield Hose Company in Harborcreek Township and remains connected to that organization. For the past 35 years, Sister Marcia has been a weekly volunteer at the Emmaus Soup Kitchen.

Therese Glass

“My long involvement as a Soup Kitchen volunteer has taught me that the giftedness of those who have little materially often are rich in the gifts of presence and generosity.”

“I have been blessed. Each ministry has helped me experience other facets of God whose revelation is on-going.”

“Pinch me! Pinch me!” my inner voice shouted as I began my postulancy with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie more than 25 years ago. The voice continued: “Am I here? Am I really here? And how did I get here?” In reply I could only answer, “Aware or unaware, all my life I’ve been seeking God.” Little did I realize then how God had been seeking me just as God seeks ALL and sustains ALL. Even less could I imagine then how my life would unfold in prayer, community and ministry.

As I celebrate my silver jubilee I am more aware of God’s unconditional love, faithfulness and presence in and through ALL. Whoever the person, wherever the place, whatever the situation, whichever the thing, God is in it. God is in whatever is.

Benedict saw the world in a single ray of light and I am coming to see the cosmos in a single ray of light. That single ray brightens my world, enlightens my mind and warms my heart. It helps me see that for which I am most grateful: my community, the various ministries in which I have served, my family and my friends. It helps me to know that “Day unto day pours out the story; night unto night makes known the beauty.” (Ps 19:3) It helps me to feel surrounded by the love of God. My jubilee is going to celebrate that gratitude.

I am sure I am where God calls me to be. Nevertheless, I continue to ask, “Am I here? Am I really here? And how did I get here?” Pinch me! Pinch me! My monastic life is so much more than I could ever have imagined!

Sister Therese Glass came to community with 30 years’ experience in elementary education, both as teacher and counselor. As an Erie Benedictine she worked at Benet Press, served as an assistant manager at Benetwood Apartments and as an instructor and intake coordinator at Saint Benedict Education Center. Presently Sister Therese works part-time as personal secretary to Sister Joan Chittister and is a part-time staff member of the Alliance for International Monasticism USA (AIM). In 2010 she traveled to Tanzania where she helped initiate an English program for African sisters.
Spreading the Benedictine Charism

By Linda Romey, OSB, Web Tech

Spreading the Benedictine charism has been a byproduct of monastic life since the Middle Ages when towns and villages sprouted and thrived around medieval monasteries. The monastery was the hub around which all activity turned.

Since 1856, the Erie Benedictines have spread the charism through the students who attended their schools and, later, through participants and collaborators in their various ministries. Generations of students imbued with Benedictine spirituality and values grew up, entered the work force, got married, raised families—and along the way, often unknowingly, spread the Benedictine way: genuine hospitality, love of prayer, commitment to peace and justice, a sense of community. Many of them have stayed connected with the community: students who became sisters or oblates, alumnae and friends who are benefactors and volunteers. In Erie, the Benedictines are a hub: for ministry, for community, for liturgy and worship.

And now we turn the dial and find ourselves in the 21st century, where the pace of life seems to have accelerated at lightning speed. No institution has been left untouched as the world has seemingly shrunk in the face of advancements in science and technology that have changed the way we do just about everything—including how we stay connected and how we spread Benedictine spirituality. Technology is the new hub around which many activities turn—at a worldwide level.

“Word-of-mouth,” once the only way people heard about the Erie Benedictines, was replaced by “found you online.” And now it’s, “like you on Facebook.”

Yes, the Erie Benedictines are now on Facebook. From Benedict’s cave at Subiaco to medieval monasteries to foundations in the New World and now to cyberspace and Facebook, the Benedictine charism is alive and well.

Like us on Facebook and the news from Mount St. Benedict Monastery will appear in your news feed. Like what we post on our Facebook page and then all your friends and family on Facebook will know that you value Benedictine life. Here and there an unknown seeker might just be curious enough about the Erie Benedictines that he or she will follow the link and find the monastery page—just like medieval pilgrims might have stumbled upon a monastery along their journey. We will welcome them in, invite them to pray, to come for a visit, to rest awhile.

Find us at facebook.com/eriebenedictines. Like us and help us continue to spread this 1,500-year-old charism.
Sister Mary Lou Kownacki Receives Oscar Romero Award

Sister Mary Lou Kownacki received the Archbishop Oscar Romero Award from Mercyhurst University and Department of Religious Studies. The award is given annually to an individual or organization living the call of faith and justice in an extraordinary manner. “This award takes its name from the late archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, who died from an assassin’s bullet on March 24, 1980,” explained Thomas Forsthoefel, Ph.D., professor of religious studies at Mercyhurst University. “Romero had become the voice of the voiceless bearing witness to justice and non-violence . . . We honor Sister Mary Lou for her intense commitment to justice. She reminds us, by her example, to respond to every opportunity to embody values of justice, peace, mercy and beauty.”

Sister Pat Lupo Receives the Keystone Award

Sister Pat Lupo received the Keystone Award from the PA Association of Environmental Educators (PAEE) at the annual conference and Youth Summit. The Keystone Award is PAEE’s most prestigious award and is presented to someone who has successfully dedicated their time to advancing the quality and opportunities of environmental education in Pennsylvania. “I am proud and honored to be presenting the Keystone award to a colleague and personal friend of over 30 years,” said Steve Wasiesky, award presenter. “She is an amazing person. I am honored to present the Keystone Award to Sister Pat.”

Sister Mary Miller: One of 2012’s Most Inspirational People

Sister Mary Miller, director of Emmaus Ministries, was named one of 2012’s most inspirational people in the city of Erie. Her commitment to the forgotten and the marginal, as well as her reverence for the inherent dignity of each and every person, is extraordinary. She lives her passion for the poor in ways that are truly a blessing for all as summed up by Joan Benson-Cacchione of the Erie Times News, “Sister Mary Miller has been a picture of sweet reliability and unconditional love in some of Erie’s bleakest neighborhoods for more than four decades.”

Sister Mary Ellen Plumb: 2013 RAVE Award Nominee

Sister Mary Ellen Plumb was one of 13 nominees for the 2013 RAVE (Recognizing Achieving Volunteers in Erie) Award. Her commitment to volunteerism was recognized and applauded at a dinner held at the Bayfront Convention Center on April 30. The event was sponsored by the Junior League of Erie, an organization of women committed to promoting volunteerism and improving the community through effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. The RAVE awards recognize individuals who have been significantly involved in making Erie a better place to live. Sister Mary Ellen has organized volunteer programs at Villa Maria Academy during her 25 years of ministry there, been a weekly volunteer at the Neighborhood Art House for the past 19 years, and volunteered at Emmaus Soup kitchen for more than 30 years.
Imagine Imagine Imagine Imagine

2013 Prophet of Peace Award

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie presented the 2013 Prophet of Peace Award to Gary Horton of Erie for his extraordinary efforts to better the Erie area by working for a more hopeful future and quality life for its people. “This award recognizes an individual or group that embodies some aspect of the community’s corporate commitment and its concerns for peace and justice, sustainability, and the needs of women and children,” said Sister Anne Wambach, Prioress. “With the Prophet of Peace Award we specifically recognize Gary for his organization of Walking in Black History.” In recognition of his accomplishments as a prophetic witness of peace and his efforts to provide leadership and commitment to the work of justice, Mr. Horton received a plaque and words of appreciation expressive of the affirmation of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

Enrichment Series at the Mount

Throughout history monasteries have been renowned as centers of learning and culture. Because study is revered as a means of enlarging the mind and the heart, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have continued the Enrichment Series that was begun in 2012.

Death: The Great Adventure

Presenter: Sr. Mary Hembrow Snyder

The first presentation in the 2013 Enrichment Series at Mount St. Benedict Monastery drew a crowd of more than 100 people interested in hearing about “Death: The Great Adventure.” In her presentation, Dr. Mary Hembrow Snyder, Professor of Religious Studies and Director, Center for Mercy and Catholic Studies, at Mercyhurst University, shared valuable insights on a topic that is no stranger to human beings. Rooted in contemporary theology, evolutionary biology and quantum physics, the lecture inspired concepts of God and death aligned with an understanding of eschatology as hope seeking understanding. She urged the audience to identify their image of God so that by meeting God in life they will know God in death. “Death is no less sacred than life,” said Dr. Snyder. “We won’t meet God in death until we meet God in life. Death will be a great adventure if we live within the world as if it were the body of God.”

The Music of Hildegard of Bingen

Presenter: Agnieszka Duda–Bieniek and the St. Noel Concert Choir

The music of Hildegard of Bingen, elevated to saint and Doctor of the Church in 2012, was experienced by those who attended the concert performed by the St. Noel Concert Choir under the direction of Agnieszka Duda–Bieniek (Aga) for the second presentation in the 2013 Enrichment Series. “Ethereal—that’s the only word that comes to my mind. It was ethereal!” exclaimed one guest after the concert. For a brief period the music offered listeners a beautiful experience of God—simple and holy, authentic and real. Aga sang several antiphons, bringing to life the magnificence of Hildegard’s music and text, and the choir was featured in a variety of pieces written to honor Hildegard. The assembly also had the opportunity to raise their voices in prayer and song. “Be not lax in celebrating. Be not lazy in the festive service of God. Be ablaze with enthusiasm. Let us be an alive, burning offering before the altar of God.” (Prayer of Hildegard)

Details for the next presentation in the 2013 Enrichment Series will be posted on the community website as soon as the topic and date is confirmed. Visit us at ErieBenedictines.org
April Community Weekend:  
Global + Local = Glocal

Presenter: Dr. Carol Zinn, SSJ

Dr. Carol Zinn, SSJ, president-elect of LCWR (Leadership Conference of Women Religious), inspired Erie Benedictine sisters and oblates during the April community weekend with her presentation: Glocal Community: Glocal Hearts, Glocal Minds, Glocal Actions. She posed the question, "Have you ever considered that we live in a GLOCAL community?" Carol went on to explain that by opening ourselves to emerging levels of consciousness and choosing to be engaged in the world in which we live we begin to understand that everything is global and local at the same time and "the world changes where our feet are planted."

"Carol challenged us to leave behind a comfortable world view for one that is real," commented Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Monastic Formation Director. "It is time for us to break through illusions and live from the core truth of interconnectedness. What is more Benedictine than that? Like Benedict, we must see the whole world before our eyes in a single ray of sunlight."

Statements in support of Immigration Reform and the Prevention of Gun Violence issued by the Conference of Benedictine Prioresse

Sister Anne Wambach, prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, attended the annual meeting of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresse (CBP) held in Tucson, Arizona, January 30–February 5. Fifty Benedictine prioresse and Federation presidents released two statements.

The first was in support of immigration reform. Many of the communities represented by CBP, including the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, have ministries that serve immigrants, migrant workers and those seeking asylum in the United States.

In an effort to address the rampant culture of gun violence and the disregard for human life, CBP issued a statement on the prevention of gun violence. The Benedictine way of life requires us not only to be people of peace but also "to foster peace in the society around us." (Of All Good Gifts, CBP)

Both statements are available at eriebenedictines.org. Access them by using the search feature.

In other conference business, Sister Christine Vladimiroff of Erie completed her term as President of the CBP. Sister Christine is currently the Executive Director of St. Benedict Education Center.
Imagine a 20-year-old Benedict in 6th century Italy leaving his wealthy family to begin his search for God as a hermit in a cave in Subiaco. Imagine Benedict as a monk writing a Rule to guide the monks of his monastery, not knowing that it would still be used in monasteries around the world 15 centuries later. Imagine his twin sister, Scholastica, and her companions establishing a community of women, our foremothers in the Benedictine way of life.

Jump forward in time to the year 1856 and imagine six Benedictine nuns, originally from Eichstatt, Bavaria, who left their new foundation in St. Marys, PA, and stopped in Erie on their way to Minnesota. Imagine them starting a Benedictine foundation in Erie to teach the children of German immigrants. Imagine how many hours the sisters have spent in prayer and work over the past 157 years. Imagine all of the people who have helped the sisters over the years. Can you imagine 2013 without the Benedictine Sisters of Erie at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery?

**OPERATING INCOME**

During the 2012 fiscal year our overall operating income decreased by 3% from the previous year related to the sisters’ changes in ministry and the level of investment activity. The majority of our income continues to come from stipends received from the sisters’ ministries, Social Security payments and some retirement accounts. Development income remained comparable to the previous year due to the generosity of our long time donors and an increase in new donors.
OPERATING EXPENSES
In 2012 our operating expenses increased by 5% over the previous fiscal year. One area impacted by increases was member expenses due to rising food prices, doctor bills and personal necessities. The continued increase in gasoline prices throughout 2012 also had a major impact on our operating expenses. Social Security programs enabled us to maintain our health care cost for the sisters who were eligible for these benefits. Our building expenses increased at the monastery with the beginning stages of our dining and community room renovation project.

SUMMARY
Our overall financial standing continues to be favorable as we completed the past year with our operating income exceeding our operating expenses. The careful management of our budget along with the generosity of our supporters enabled us to end the year in the black. We continue to find ways to cut or maintain our costs whenever possible. Reduce, reuse and recycle is a part of our daily activity. Our investment strategy, which is reviewed quarterly, continues to provide ongoing income for the operational budget as well as support for our retired sisters.

Ministry changes have become more common for some sisters as they move toward retirement leaving their long term ministries to begin ministering at the monastery. Although these changes have some impact on our budget we have been fortunate that many have retirement accounts funded through past ministries that continue to provide an income stream. While we continue to study our retirement needs we have been unable to set aside additional retirement funds. According to the National Religious Retirement Office, we remain 81% underfunded to meet our future retirement needs. We are exploring avenues to increase income through our development programs.

Imagine the impact that our generous and loving supporters have had on the life and work of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. The sisters cannot imagine our life without you.

Development Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Programs</td>
<td>294,945.25</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unrestricted Gifts</td>
<td>40,353.70</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restricted Gifts</td>
<td>204,507.30</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>539,806.25</strong></td>
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Benedictine Sisters of Erie

Operating Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sisters’ Stipends/Salaries</td>
<td>2,141,393.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development/Gifts</td>
<td>539,806.25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Income before Investment Activity</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment Activity</td>
<td>581,305.35</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Income after Investment Activity</strong></td>
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Operating Expenses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>289,998.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Members’ Personal Expenses</td>
<td>910,627.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Payroll Expenses</td>
<td>773,429.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property/Buildings/Transportation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,128,766.55</strong></td>
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A Leap of Faith:
The Sisters Dare to Dream

By Jo Clarke, Oblate, Director of Annual Giving

Imagination — that’s the key: the ability to see beyond the reality in front of our eyes to the possibilities if we are daring enough to act. Who can see a cathedral in a pile of rocks? Who can see a monastery on an overgrown hill on a dusty Erie road? Who can see a welcoming, worshipping and committed community in a diverse group of women and men? Can you? What would life be like if we never dared to dream? There would be little creativity and even less belief in future possibilities.

The handful of young German-speaking nuns who embarked on a journey to Erie, PA in 1856 must have had a great deal of imagination—they surely saw the cathedral in the rock pile. They took a huge leap of faith when they left their home in Bavaria, settled in St. Marys, PA, and then after only five years, climbed aboard a wagon to travel to Erie. Those brave women dreamt that through lives centered in community and prayer, they would be able to change the world by educating the children of German immigrants who did not have access to a quality education. They would also minister to the needs of the poor, especially women and children.

That’s exactly what happened recently when the sisters embarked on the latest project at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery. In January, after many hours of planning, meetings, and consultation, the sisters began the much-needed renovation of the community and dining rooms. It was a huge leap of faith because before we had a chance to raise funds for the project, the sisters had signed a contract to secure lower winter rates for indoor work.

Cash had to be borrowed from the sisters’ underfunded retirement account with the hope that it would be paid back. Some might say it was an irresponsible thing to do. Others, like me, believe that with prayer, hard work, and a passionate belief in our mission, all things are possible. As of May 9, we have raised $109,035 toward these renovations.

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie, as you know, are a beacon of hope for all whom they meet, whether in the inner city or at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery. While all the sisters’ ministries grow out of the Benedictine charism, the monastery itself has always been a place where people hungry for spiritual nourishment find respite and welcome. A hospitality where all are welcomed as Christ is needed even more in the face of our fragmented, isolated and secular reality.

In our increasingly fast-paced world there is a growing desire for contemplation, balance, and simplicity. This desire is reflected not only in the 1,000+ visitors who are welcomed to the monastery every year, but also in the increasing numbers in the Oblate program — a program that has attracted 280+ members to live the Benedictine way of life in the world.

The sisters, with your help, want to ensure that the monastery is maintained and perpetuated as a pivotal community resource and to provide a comfortable, simple, practical living space that nourishes not only the spirit but the body as well. At the same time, it is also a gentler presence on the earth with greater energy efficiency.

Renovation Planning Committee:
Back Row (L to R): Gary Good, Sisters Annette Marshall, Margaret Ann Pilewski and Diane Rabe, Dan Welsh
Front Row (L to R): Sisters Justina Gutowski, Anne McGreevy, Rosanne Loneck, Charles Marie Holze

Sister Charles Marie Holze, Director of Physical Resources
The renovations are doing just that. Goals included:

**Renovations in the Dining Room**
- Update electric, plumbing, and lighting.
- Widen buffet and beverage lines to be more user-friendly to those with adaptive equipment.
- Redesign the area to be energy efficient and more accessible for all.
- Eliminate noise from the kitchen, dishwashing area, refrigerators and beverage machines by installing new doors and solid walls.
- Replace aging, inefficient steam/chilling table with new sanitary, easy to maintain table.
- Install a new ceiling to achieve better acoustics for easier table conversation.
- Convert open divider walls by the buffet to solid walls.
- Replace 20-year-old lighting with new energy efficient LED lighting fixtures.
- Replace 20-year-old heavily stained worn carpet with low maintenance textile type flooring, called Flotex.

**Renovations in the Community Room**
- Create a flexible area that can be used for large or small gatherings, meetings, retreats, and enrichment programs.
- Provide built in storage space for portable stage, podium and audio/visual equipment so that heavy equipment doesn’t have to be moved further than necessary.
- Install energy efficient lighting, ceiling tiles and flooring, the same as in the dining room.
- Create a wheelchair accessible entry/exit to patio area.
- Provide a pleasant, comfortable area for guests and sisters to relax and enjoy conversation.

As Sister Diane Rabe, Co-Chair of the renovation planning committee, said, “One of the key components in the Rule of Benedict is that we are called to treat all things like vessels of the altar. It’s about doing things well so they last a long time and making sure they are aesthetically pleasing, not only for ourselves, but also for our guests. More and more guests, like our oblates, are joining us to hear speakers so the old space was becoming cramped, noisy, and generally uncomfortable. With the new open plan concept that has wider food service lines, enhanced acoustics, and super stain resistant flooring, we will be able to open the room to the growing numbers of visitors for many years to come.”

“When we leave the chapel, the community room and dining room are seen by the sisters as an extension of the celebration of the Eucharist and our Benedictine charism of hospitality,” shared Sister Rosanne Loneck, Co-Chair of the renovation planning committee. “We wanted an area that would better serve the needs of our community while allowing the older sisters to remain independent as long as possible,” she continued. “We needed a living and dining space that would be multi-purpose, flexible, practical, comfortable, spacious, easy care and “green,” as well as welcoming, inviting, and, reflecting a simple beauty. It says in the Rule of Benedict that monasteries are never without guests ...we hope, in this new setting, to provide a celebration of the present moment so that each sister, guest or visitor will take with them a piece of PAX, peace, wherever they go.”
Our total budget is $320,024. We need only $210,989 to complete the project; if there is any way you can help with a financial gift, the sisters would be very grateful. Look at the photos, imagine what the future would be like without the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, and if you can’t imagine such a future…then send a gift today!

The renovation and updating of the community room and dining rooms will not only provide a pleasant and practical place for the sisters to relax and catch up after a long day, but also offer a warm and welcoming area for guests attending retreats, days of reflections, meetings, or celebrations.

**There are a number of different ways you can give:**

+ go to our secure website, ErieBenedictines.org, and use your credit card;
+ return the remittance envelope included in this magazine with a gift of cash, check or credit card;
+ call me, Jo Clarke, Director of Annual Giving, at 814-899-0614, ext. 2281, with your credit card information and the details of the gift you would like to make. Please don’t hesitate to call if I can be of any help.

Don’t forget, you are welcome to visit the monastery and experience Benedictine hospitality first hand. I look forward to meeting you when you come!

*Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.*

*Gloria Steinem*
From the Director

By Ann Comstock, Oblate

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

A Tribute to the Women of Saint Benedict Academy

By Ann Comstock, St. Benedict Academy Alumnae Coordinator

The women of the Saint Benedict Academy Alumnae Association are awesome! The generosity of these women, who give their time and presence as well as their monetary support to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie and their various ministries, has made a huge impact on the lives of many.

June 2013 marks the 25th anniversary of the month Saint Benedict Academy closed its doors for the last time. Since that closing in 1988 the SBA alumnae have maintained their identity and remained strong in spirit. We continue to nurture our bonds to each other while supporting the ministries of the Benedictine Sisters and promoting Catholic Education.

People marvel at such loyalty: “How can a school that has been closed for a quarter of a century command such faithfulness, such fidelity, such commitment from its members?” they ask. The answer is easy — alumnae value the education they received from the sisters. We learned to appreciate ourselves, to live with purpose and to work as part of something greater than ourselves. We are committed to building community wherever we are and to offering our gifts for others.

We continue to be one of the largest contributors to the Benedictine community each year. We volunteer in many of the community’s ministries. We award $4,000 annually in scholarships to relatives of alumnae attending Catholic Schools. We contributed funds for the building the bell tower at the monastery and the gazebo in the Garden of Memories, and countless camper scholarships for inner-city children to attend Camp Glinodo.

We aim high! Remember ‘Encore 94’, a sold-out concert at Gannon Auditorium directed by our dear Sister Mary David Callahan where we raised $40,000 to help start the Inner-city Neighborhood Art House? How about our Christmas Concert in 2005 — directed by Sister Marilyn Schauble and performed at the Warner Theatre for an audience of over 17,000 where we raised more than $27,000 for the sisters’ Capital Campaign?

Remember all the Christmas parties held at the Avalon Hotel and the Ambassador Conference Center where we consistently have over 425 attendees each year? Remember the bus trips, the summer picnics, the Communion brunches and Walk the Halls? How about Christmas in July, 2012? Thanks to all the good women of SBA for so many wonderful events and cherished memories. You are awesome indeed. And now, the future awaits us!

We maintain our bond to one another through well-attended social events and class reunions. We enjoy getting together to have fun, to share memories, and to support one another. We delight in each other’s company and like to celebrate the special bond of being SBAers.

“SPIRIT OF SBA” IS ALIVE AND WELL.

Let us pray...

For our SBA alumnae who passed into eternity—

Ann Marie Seus Cage ’39
Mary Ernst Walczak ’40
Rosemarie Murphy Kohler ’44
Dolores Moritz Lorei ’44
Kathleen Louise Carey Dombrowski ’45
Mary Ann Kraus Wickham ’45
Alice Nevecki Dombrowski ’47
Shirley Ida Gertrude Becker Kiehlmeier ’47
Dorothy T. Kopkowski Kowsalski ’47
DeSales Ryan Palkovic ’48
Phyllis Alamenciak Pihlblad ’55
Mary Ann Grutkowski Riddle ’55
Kathleen Barber Young ’58
Charlene Coleman Riblet ’59
Patricia Ann Wells ’70
Michol Lea Farmer Leasure ’80
Florence V. Dellecese Flamio Horstman
Jacqueline A. Borgia Grygier

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

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

Scholarship Winners 2013-2014
We are very pleased to announce that 20 scholarships of $250 each were awarded to relatives of SBA alumnae who will attend grades K - 12 in Catholic schools for the 2013-2014 school year. This program has contributed over $61,750 in support of Catholic education since it began in 1991. The alumnae association gratefully shows our support for Catholic education through these much-appreciated scholarships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Alumnae Member</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben Bruno</td>
<td>Elizabeth Gawronski</td>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>Cathedral Prep School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Moran</td>
<td>Kathy Little</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Our Lady’s Christian School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Kerner</td>
<td>Karen Knoch</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>St. George School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deangelo Malone</td>
<td>Nancy Malone</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallagher Children</td>
<td>Mary Ann Toohey</td>
<td>Grandchildren</td>
<td>St. George School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Rinke</td>
<td>Toni Griffith</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst Prep School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie Titus</td>
<td>Rosemary Niebauer</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>Our Lady of Mercy School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garrett Hawley</td>
<td>Patricia Hawley</td>
<td>Grandson</td>
<td>John Paul the Great School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joseph Theiss</td>
<td>Evelyn Selleny</td>
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<td>Andrew Boothe</td>
<td>Patricia Mangold</td>
<td>Nephew</td>
<td>All Saints of John Vianney School</td>
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<td>Victoria Murawski</td>
<td>Lucille Murawski</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Villa Maria Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cameron Dunbar</td>
<td>Margaret James</td>
<td>Niece</td>
<td>St. Luke’s School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sophia Skrzypczak</td>
<td>Susan Chase</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Blessed Sacrament School</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morgan Szoszorek</td>
<td>Mary Lou Schroek</td>
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<td>Justin Cooper</td>
<td>Janet Benovic</td>
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<td>Bailey Witherspoon</td>
<td>Tracey Witherspoon</td>
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<td>Sean Reed</td>
<td>Mary Alice Wilczynski</td>
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<td>Hunter Neimeic</td>
<td>Nadine Laufer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ashley N. McWilliams</td>
<td>Judith Kuhn</td>
<td>Granddaughter</td>
<td>Mercyhurst Prep School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Visit ErieBenedictines.org/sba-alum for event updates and to download sign-up forms, or send your email address to Alumnae Director Ann Comstock at sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org to receive electronic reminders and sign-ups. If you don’t use email, write to Ann at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, 6101 East Lake Road, Erie, PA, 16511. Whenever you see or hear about SBA alumnae being honored or highlighted for their achievements, let us know. Clip an article or jot down the details then call, write or email us the information so we can share the news with all our members.

RAVE Award
Mary Hoffman, SBA Class of 1970, along with her co-worker, Mary Ellen Lieb, received the 2013 RAVE (Recognizing Achieving Volunteers of Erie) Award for top adult volunteer. RAVE awards are presented annually by the Junior League of Erie to promote volunteerism. RAVE is a way to award those who have made a difference in Erie.

Mary and Mary Ellen, co-directors of the Inspire Organization (INSPIRE), were honored for the work they do to provide education and support to adults with special needs. Their goal is to help these individuals find independence within the Erie community. INSPIRE, like its name, is more than an educational center. Under Mary and Mary Ellen’s leadership its students prepare a spring play replete with props, set design, choreography and costumes. They encourage the students to overcome the challenges of preparation and performance. The play performance showcases the skills and strengths that Mary and Mary Ellen help the students to discover. Through INSPIRE Mary and Mary Ellen give these adult students with special needs a supported platform from which to blossom and thrive.
Peppermint Twist 2012: SBA Christmas Party
At last year’s SBA Christmas Party held at the Ambassador Conference Center, a beautiful sight unfolded as nearly 500 alumnae members gathered to share old memories and make new ones. Joy and laughter filled the room as friendships were rekindled and stories were shared as if it were just yesterday that we walked the halls of the Academy. Anticipation ran high as everyone waited to hear if they were lucky winners of one or even two of the more than 90 beautiful themed gift baskets that were donated to be raffled off. The monies raised provided a generous gift of $6,000 to the Inner-city Neighborhood Art House. As always, it was a wonderful event which grows and improves with each passing year. Thanks to all who made it such a memorable evening.
Mount Saint Benedict Monastery
6101 East Lake Road
Erie, PA 16511-1599

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

Benedicta Riepp Program

Is something tugging at your heart?
A desire for deeper meaning? ...for a new moment in life?

Explore your life questions by living with our monastic community for 6-12 months. In the Benedicta Riepp Monastic Experience Program you will immerse yourself in a daily rhythm of • prayer • work • outreach to the marginalized • communal life • hospitality • peace and nonviolence.

If you'd like to consider this experience for yourself, contact Sister Stephanie Schmidt, OSB, Director of the Benedicta Riepp Program, for more information.
Phone: 814-899-0614, ext. 2511
Email: formation@mtstbenedict.org