THE HEART OF HUMANITY SHIMMERS WITH DIVINITY

As a Benedictine community our lives, our liturgy, and our work all bear witness to the action of God in a world in need of transformation. Christmas reminds us that transformation happens by incarnation. If incarnation is an embodiment in the flesh and transformation starts with incarnation, the question is: What must be incarnated to make transformation happen right now in the world in which we live and move day by day, in the world that expands beyond our personal reality?

Perhaps the answer is found in Christmas.

Christmas, the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, God-become-flesh, started the Christian transformation of the world. Jesus embodied God. Jesus embodied love made visible. Jesus transformed the world by revealing God. Jesus transformed the world by love. How do we continue what Jesus started?

For us, the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, our monastic life is an incarnation of many things. This issue of The Mount shows how we embody God and seek to transform the world through our corporate commitment and our Benedictine ministries. It shows how, through a variety of associations, others join us in bringing a monastic presence to a world in search of the transforming power of God. It shows how the support of our families, friends, oblates, benefactors and SBA alumnae allows us to maintain our life and our work of transformation in the present moment.

American theologian Avery Dulles said: “The Incarnation does not provide us with a ladder by which to escape from the ambiguities of life and scale the heights of heaven. Rather, it enables us to burrow deep into the heart of our humanity and find it shimmering with divinity.”

In this blessed season we celebrate nothing less than the beginning of transformation by the presence of the divine in our midst. May you see it shimmering in the heart of your humanity; may you see it shimmering in the heart of all humanity; may you see it shimmering in the heart of all creation.

Charlotte Anne Zalot, OSB

Angel with Incense

Cover Photo by Jo Clarke, Oblate

Four worshipping angels were depicted in stained glass and designed for the sanctuary of the 1915 expanded chapel in the first mother house on East Ninth Street. They were preserved when the chapel was demolished in 1973. Three of those angel windows have been restored; one has been lost. Angel with Incense is the last of the restored windows. After being restored in 1987-88 by Oblate, Marcie Bircher, this window was installed on the first floor north wing of the Monastery. Incense can serve as a reminder that, even when Christ’s presence is intangible, God is with us nevertheless. Angel with Incense reflects the message of Christmas: "Emmanuel . . . God with us!”

BENEDICTINE CHARISM STATEMENT

The Benedictine way is to seek God in cenobitic life and to respond in prayer and ministry.
The Incarnation of Perfect Love

One of the three vows we as Benedictines profess is the vow of conversatio morum, conversion. We promise to spend our lives growing, living in a constant state of development, always changing.

Growing into what, you may ask. Growing into the fullness of life, the fullness of who we are called to be as followers of Jesus Christ and as proclaimers of the Gospel he himself announced and lived.

Christmas, to me, is a celebration of the beginning of that Gospel message, the beginning of Jesus’ own life of growth and transformation into the fullness of Himself—as both human and Divine.

This Incarnation, this birth into newness each year is a Christian way to interpret George Eliot’s famous reflection, “It is never too late to be who you might have been.” Each Christmas season I remember that truth. I see it in my own life and in my own choices. I share it in the conversion moments of the members of our community, some of whom have faithfully lived conversatio morum much longer than I. And, I see it in the hundreds of guests who come to our monastery each year in search of God, perhaps in search of a transforming moment, a search for who they might become, who they are called to be.

Our community is well-known for and is certainly very dedicated to our ministries of good works for, with, and on behalf of the people of God. In those, too, we follow the example of Jesus and we are most grateful for outcomes seen as “successful” in the area of transformation. We know well what Gandhi preached, “As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world—as in being able to remake ourselves.”

What we celebrate at Christmas is the Incarnation of God among us, which transforms us into God’s very presence for others. This year and every year the Spirit of the Incarnation, Christmas, gives us another chance, another reminder, another moment to remember what Jesus’ life and our lives are really about: becoming people who, in the remaking of ourselves, do change the world.

Anne Wambach, OSB
Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Corporate Commitment

As Benedictine Sisters of Erie we commit ourselves to be a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace by working for sustainability and justice, especially for women and children.

Through their ministries the Benedictine Sisters of Erie strive to bring the transformative power of Jesus Christ into the lives of individuals and families. We strive to make a difference by upholding our corporate commitment, the vision that we have agreed to promote as a community and as individuals no matter where or in how many diverse ministries we might be engaged. As women committed to ministry, we are passionate about the care we extend and the services we offer. We know that sharing the life and love that the Gospel of Jesus Christ teaches allows us to make a difference in the lives of the people to whose needs we attend.

You are invited to step into the world of our Benedictine ministries, to read and reflect on stories from the directors of those ministries. We hope the stories touch your heart and give you pause; we hope they help you understand just a little bit better what we do and why we do it.
What does a publishing ministry like Benetvision have to do with the Incarnation?

Maybe these examples will suggest an answer.

Every week 18,000 people, Benetvision customers, receive an e-mail from Erie Benedictine Joan Chittister that tries to shine a ray of light on a real human concern—forgiveness, anger, discrimination. Is it an incarnation? A reader wrote: “Dearest Joan, your e-mail came at the perfect time this morning and has given me a sense of peace and affirmed life being a series of learnings.”

The *Monastic Way* by Joan Chittister is mailed to subscribers each month, and sent free to thousands of prisoners through the Benetvision Fund for Prisoners. Is it an incarnation? A prisoner wrote, “It is about 5 a.m. and I just finished reading from *The Monastic Way*. It’s a pure blessing to start my day like this. I’m a 51-year-old male who has a life-long history of crime, drugs and irresponsibility. And now, breath-by-breath and moment-to-moment, I want to become truly and deeply responsible to God. I want you to know that all of you are truly helping others and are making a great impact in the human and spiritual experience.”

The Benetvision 2013 Lenten publication, *God Speaks in Many Tongues: Lectio with Joan Chittister*, contains 40 sacred texts from the five major religions and a short reflection by Sister Joan on each of them. Is it an incarnation? Our hope is that this Lenten practice will soften the hearts of many, make them more tolerant of others and spread compassion.

This is our understanding of the incarnation—that God became human and, in so doing, made everything human holy.

Through its publications, retreats and website Benetvision tries to inspire, challenge, and invite people to full humanity.

If people pick up a Benetvision product, we hope they say, “Emmanuel, God with us.”
Benetwood is much more than a 75-unit apartment building subsidized by HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) for low-income elderly and/or mobility-disabled individuals. Benetwood is home. Benetwood is community.

Known for its atmosphere of hospitality, care and concern for the other, at Benetwood the dignity of each person is honored with respect and compassion. No surprise there: Benetwood is a Benedictine ministry directed and staffed by Benedictine sisters, women who understand that one of the outstanding hallmarks of Benedictinism is hospitality; women who understand that “Hospitality is one of those things that has to be constantly practiced or it won’t be there for the rare occasion.” (Joan Chittister, OSB)

Far different from society at large, Benetwood offers safety and security to individuals in their senior years. The peace and tranquility they experience, for some, is far different from what they experienced in other living situations. Here they find an atmosphere of love and acceptance. They are surrounded by beauty — both in the building they now call home and in the grounds outside — with the woods and the deer, turkeys and birds. They walk the paths without fear; they experience the calmness that nature offers.

Moving and downsizing at this stage of life can be extremely difficult but being able to talk about it with others who have gone through the same thing is helpful. The residents, like Jesus, extend a “welcome” and a helping hand to the newcomer and soon there is “no stranger among us.” Then, the hospitality they felt when they moved in is shared with others who come afterward; the now-settled resident welcomes another newcomer. It’s a domino effect continuing from one person to another. The warmth and welcome become contagious.

We often hear it said, “What can be done to change the way things are going?” At Benetwood it begins with one or two people caring about the other, respecting the other; and from there, it grows and grows and grows. That is the real heart of Benetwood: the union of care and kindness, hospitality and helpfulness to create an environment in which one can thrive. It’s an example of transformation for the world community. The staff and residents of Benetwood are doing their part to bring about that transformation. Our wisdom is simple: “Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world. For, indeed, that’s all who ever have.” (Margaret Mead)
Receiving a child from the hands of their parents each day is a leap of faith for both the parents and the caregivers of the Saint Benedict Center Child Development Program. Smiles and gentle, comforting words from the caregivers instill confidence in parents as they allow their child to enter into the “school environment.” The parents of 105 children between the ages of 6 weeks and five years old drop them off or put them on the Center’s bus in the morning, knowing as they go about the tasks of their own day that their children are well cared for and loved.

The Center provides the children with a different way of approaching the world; during their day they experience a social setting that requires sharing ideas, toys, and space with others their age. The poem “All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten,” tells the story of preschool education. Life skills are learned early; the staff works hard at loving children into becoming. Much more than numbers and letters, the children learn the importance of listening to everyone’s story and also commenting on it. Have you ever really listened to a toddler or preschooler’s take on life? It’s so unencumbered and real. As Desmond Tutu said, “Children are a wonderful gift. They have an extraordinary capacity to see into the heart of things and to expose sham and humbug for what they are.” By their words and their wisdom, the children to whom we minister help us to do our ministry well.

The basic needs of each child are monitored while at the Center. If a child requires medical assessment or treatment, families are connected with services and provided transportation and translation if necessary. To empower parents to advocate for their children, the Center offers families many avenues to connect with area programs and services.

At times, when a family is not able to provide clothing, the classroom staff will purchase items with their own funds. Such kindness and generosity are what make the daily happenings at the Center so very special. Monetary gifts would enable more children to enter the program and provide for clothing needs. A donation of volunteer time would allow for more adults in the classrooms, providing more one-on-one time for vocabulary and social development. Gifts and kindnesses such as these will insure that Saint Benedict Child Development Center continue its work in the world.

“Kindness to children, love for children, goodness to children — these are the only investments that never fail.” —Henry David Thoreau
These are Paula’s reflections:

We all search for and hope to find in our lifetime the perfect love: that sense that we are one with some element greater than ourselves. Many of us discover or, more accurately, rediscover, that love during the Christmas season when we are moved and filled with the spirit brought to us with the birth of Christ.

Christ was born under lowly circumstances, a meager beginning that could not foretell of all he would bring the world. Christ recognized the disenfranchised of the world and brought dignity and acceptance to them. He sought out those on the fringes of society and touched them in ways that would forever change their lives.

The St. Benedict Community Center commits to and accomplishes the same today. The staff reaches out to the handicapped, hungry, poor, young, and old of all races and religions to bring them the spirit of Christ through programs that bring value and hope to their lives. No one can walk away from a dance recital by the residents of Erie Homes for Children and Adults, or a wheelchair athlete participating in a basketball game, or a neighborhood child finding comfort and security in an afterschool program without seeing the love of Christ in that space and that moment. These groups and more have been touched by the Center and their lives, like those that Christ touched, have been changed forever. St. Benedict Community Center teaches, advocates, and presents that perfect love not just at Christmas but 365 days a year.

— Paula Michalegko
Parent, friend, oblate and donor

In order to continue this work financial donations are vital. We also need to spread the word about our facility. We have two gyms for a variety of sports and two all-purpose rooms for such things as yoga, zumba, classrooms or meetings. If you or someone you know is looking for such space please encourage them to call Sister Dianne at 814-459-2406.
By Christine Vladimiroff, OSB

What we celebrate at Christmas is the mystery of God’s saving action promised so long ago. It is fulfilled in the ordinariness of human history. It is revealed to others in the span of our lifetime as we are sent to proclaim the God we know. The child that brings light into darkness comes from simple people, from a place that is relatively insignificant. The Incarnation teaches us to look for God’s gift in the world around us.

St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC) is about transformation. It is about opening doors and hearts and minds that the future can be different than today. It is about encouraging personal change that is nourished by the traces of hope that build confidence and self-esteem as a person acquires new skills. As the Christmas celebration teaches us, people can walk in the newness of life and grace. They need companions on the journey.

Our ministry is a concrete way to pour out Christ’s love to more than 1,500 individuals in six counties who look to us for opportunities to move from the margins of society into the center. It is a place where the 150 refugees, a long way from home and with little hope of ever returning, can find a community of grace and compassion. They can begin to learn a new language, become comfortable in a new culture and gift us with the culture and language they bring.

For the transformation that is promised to us in the mystery of Christmas and the incarnation, we need to shape our world so that it is home for everyone. At SBEC we embrace our Benedictine tradition of hospitality that asks us to receive each person as Christ. The transformative love comes alive in our midst, in the city where people dwell. The possibility of a new way of life happens now when we affirm the fundamental goodness of human life and concerns and sanctify them even further by our outpouring of love. Catholic Social Teaching tells us that if we work for the common good then all persons will have an opportunity for full human development and a meaningful life. No one will be left out.

While Christmas morning may be a time for opening gifts and family celebrations, it is also a time when the gift of Christ is poured out for us. It is a time when justice and mercy appear, when nations seek the ways of peace, when reconciliation transforms us. Christmas celebrates generosity, first the generosity of God then our generosity with one another. This is the heart of Saint Benedict Education Center’s ministry.
By Annette Marshall, OSB

On the corner of 10th and Holland, an abandoned building with a weed-cracked parking lot was an obvious expression of the lack of hope that so often characterizes inner-city neighborhoods. That was 18 years ago.

Today that same corner provides a vibrant green space that invites neighborhood children to the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House. The building has been transformed into a bright and welcoming place where children embrace the beauty of the arts and the beauty that is within them. Just as clay in the hands of children is molded into miniature cats or bowls or pendants, so too the children themselves are molded by the development of their talents, the success of their efforts, and the affirmation of their teachers.

On any given school day just before 3:00 p.m. children ages 7-14 eagerly make their way to the Art House door. From the moment they are greeted by Sister Mary Ellen until their dismissal more than two hours later by Sister Peg, these young ones soak up the love and individual attention given so generously by the faculty and volunteers who challenge and support them as they learn a new dance step, blend pigments, stretch their fingers over the piano keyboard, labor over the wording of a poem or struggle through a math problem with a tutor.

Into lives touched by neighborhood violence and the daily struggle of families to resist the downward spiral of poverty, the Neighborhood Art House offers the spirit-lifting influence of the arts. Surely, hope is alive here.

Financial support, whether small gifts or large, individual or business, is essential. Without it, the Art House simply would not exist. Additionally, volunteers serve on committees, conduct our tutoring and Hooked on Books! programs, offer courses in art and private music lessons, and serve as program assistants. Donations of art supplies, healthy snacks, personal items for “birthday bags,” and office supplies have a significant impact on our operating budget. It is the generosity of people who care about inner-city children that is needed to continue this work of transformation.
I’m going to let one of our soup kitchen guests answer whether or not Emmaus is an incarnation moment in the lives of those we serve.

One Friday I was closing the soup kitchen with Nancy, an 18-year-old girl who was volunteering for the first time. We were cleaning tables and I walked over to help her wipe up spilled coffee, breadcrumbs and other garbage. “Sure are a lot of dirty tables in this joint, aren’t there Nancy?” I said jokingly. Before Nancy had a chance to respond, a voice answered,

“This ain’t a joint, Sister. This is a church.”

I turned toward the voice a bit startled because I thought everyone had left. But one of our guests, Joe, was tucked in at the corner table, finishing his desert. I walked over and sat down at the table. “Why did you say that, Joe? Why do you think this is a church?”

Joe looked up at me and said simply,

“Because this is where I find God, Sister Mary.”

So when Emmaus serves its daily meal to more than 200 soup kitchen guests, when it distributes hundreds of food bags each week at its food pantry and when it serves a daily hot meal to 70 children at its Kids Cafe; when it meets some of the rent, utility and emergency needs of Erie’s poor – we have only one purpose and it is Incarnation.

Are we being Christ in the midst of their hunger, addiction, loneliness, financial struggles, depression? Do people feel the presence of God with us? Do they find God in our midst?
The Benedictine way is to seek God in the communal life and to respond in prayer and ministry.

The Oblate Way of Life

Oblate Commitment Ceremony 2012

On Saturday, October 27, more than 280 women and men renewed their commitment to the Erie Benedictines as Oblates of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery, with over 100 present for the commitment ceremony. During the ceremony, which took place within the context of Evening Prayer, the Initiates and Oblates expressed a desire to live out the Charism statement and the Corporate Commitment of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

In response, Prioress Sister Anne Wambach said, “After reading the Oblate commitment papers and experiencing the energy of this moment, I am assured that each of us desires the ‘further journey’ – seeking an inner life with God, to see with eyes of faith, sharing our faith with others and giving back fully and freely – that all may see how God is working in our lives and what the future may bring.”

As part of the commitment ceremony, the sisters blessed and welcomed all of the Initiates and Oblates into a relationship of mutual support and invited them to be a strong voice calling for the transformation of the world.

The community expressed their affirmation with a blessing prayer and a long and heartfelt standing ovation.

Twenty-One Initiates Commit to the Oblate Way of Life

Twenty-one initiates, women and men embracing the Oblate Way of Life for the first time during the Commitment Ceremony, have begun their journey with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. After expressing their desire to spend the coming year studying the Rule of Benedict and living the Gospel values of peace and justice more intensely they each received a copy of the Rule of Benedict. Prioress Sister Anne Wambach presented the Rule to each with these words:

*Receive this Rule of Benedict. May it be light for your nights and hope for your days. May light and hope continue to enliven your hearts with passion for the transformation of the world.*

Initiates respond:

I have been the blessed recipient of the community’s hospitality now for some 15 years . . . During this time I have felt a deeper and deeper call to become more involved with the community through the Oblate Way of Life . . . I wish to join the sisters “spiritually” each day, not just when I am honored to be their guest.

— Ann Chadowski, Berea, OH

I commit to let the ear of my heart and the warmth in my heart be shown to all people who have entered my life and who will enter my life. I want to enrich the lives of others with hope, especially through my volunteer commitment at the Food Pantry and Soup Kitchen of Emmaus Ministries. I commit my time and talents to the Benedictine community and look forward to my life as an oblate.

— Marie Wolf, Erie, PA

In addition to the new Initiates, three people transferred their oblation to Mount Saint Benedict Monastery. “Our Oblates, Initiates and transfers are gift to our community and to the world,” said outgoing Oblate Director, Sister Marilyn Schauble.
The Benedictine way is to seek God in the communal life and to respond in prayer and ministry.

Oblate Co-Directors in Place

Sister Anne Wambach appointed Sisters Ann Hoffman and Audrey Steff as the new co-directors of the community’s Oblate program. Together they will work with the 280 women and men from across the United States, Canada, Mexico and abroad whose desire it is to seek God with the Erie Benedictines through a life based on the Rule of Benedict.

Sister Ann Hoffman is an Assistant Manager at Benetwood Apartments. Her primary role is to complete much of the paperwork required by HUD. In addition, she is responsible for planning and coordinating resident activities. “I am delighted and excited and a bit humbled to be a co-director. I am looking forward to sharing the Benedictine way of life with our oblates. It will be a privilege to walk the journey of Benedictine life together with them.”

“As a new co-director of the Oblates I see a few challenges ahead for me,” said Sister Audrey. “For example, trying to learn all the Oblates’ names will be the first one I face and working to keep the program running as smoothly as in the past might take a little doing as well. Computer is not my forte but I have a feeling those skills are going to get a lot stronger. The best part is that I am very excited to work and pray with our Oblates. I think it is going to be great.” Sister Audrey is in ministry at Saint Benedict Education Center. She works with adult refugees from Bhutan and some African countries teaching them the alphabet, numbers and the basics of the English language.

The new directors will build on the work of Sister Marilyn Schauble, Oblate Director for the past six years. “The years with the Oblates have been a blessing for me. I have been humbled by their sincerity and commitment as they seek God and give witness to their family members, friends, and co-workers. How they live Benedictine values truly makes the world a better place!”

Sister Marilyn, also the community’s Vocation Director, will now concentrate her energies on journeying with women discerning a vocation to the monastic way of life with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

Oblate Jo Clarke presents Sister Marilyn with a gift of flowers and words of gratitude from the Oblates.

If you are interested in knowing more about the Oblate Way of Life, contact Sister Ann or Sister Audrey at oblates@mtstbenedict.org or call them at 814-899-0614.

If you desire to
— deepen your relationship with God, with others and with yourself
— ground your spirituality in values based on simplicity, respect, hospitality, and reverence for all life
— enter into a distinct relationship with others and want to be sustained by others on a similar spiritual path

Consider becoming an Oblate of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie!
To learn more, visit ErieBenedictines.org.
“Pat, what is it you seek?” Sister Anne Wambach, Prior, asked Pat Witulski, a grade school teacher from Buffalo, NY. In a loud, clear voice Pat responded, “I seek to live the monastic way of life within this community as I continue my spiritual journey.”

Thus began Pat’s journey as a postulant with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie on August 19.

The simple rite of passage from the inquiry stage to the postulancy began with Pat knocking on the front door of the monastery. Sister Anne invited Pat inside where the community had gathered to welcome her. After her initial question to Pat, Sister Anne then directed the next question to the community, asking if they would support Pat in her seeking of God. The sisters responded, “Yes, we will.” They were then asked to support Sister Stephanie Schmidt in her responsibility of walking with Pat as Postulant Director.

As a sign of her willingness to follow Christ more closely, Sister Anne presented Pat with a small wooden cross. The brief ceremony ended with a welcoming applause before the sisters processed together to the dining room to share a celebratory meal.

Pat shared her feelings about the ceremony marking her new commitment: “My heart was filled with excitement and joy. I am ready to embark upon a long-awaited journey into monastic communal life, prayer, and ministry. On that day I felt and continue to feel the desire to immerse myself in the nurturing, compassionate life-force of the Benedictine Sisters as I surrender my will to God so that I can be an authentic witness of our loving Creator.”

The postulancy is a time to become more familiar with Benedictine spirituality as it is lived daily. It is also a time to discern the authenticity of the call to be a member of this particular community.

As a postulant, Pat will participate in the prayer, work and life of the community. She spent her first month in community volunteering in a variety of Benedictine ministries. After discerning where her gifts matched the community’s needs, Pat chose to work at St. Benedict Education Center (SBEC) in the ministry of teaching English and basic skills to the participants who are refugees.

The initial monastic formation program includes one day a week that is devoted to prayer and reflection, an opportunity to nourish body, mind and spirit. This provides the opportunity for Pat to study monasticism, Scripture and lectio and to explore her questions about this new monastic lifestyle.

Whenever a woman enters the community the whole is transformed in some way. Pat’s presence among us reminds each sister of the fervor of her own first call and eager seeking of God. It is an invitation to recommit our lives to God and this community with renewed zeal. We are all blessed in this experience!
From the Vocation Director

**Vocation ministry** is a journey into a new world:
— a world of women seeking God on a spiritual path
— a world of women looking for others living the Gospel life with passion and compassion

**Vocation ministry** involves being willing to be on the move:
— moving forward, opening new doors, trying new ideas, finding new paths or new ways to walk old paths

**Vocation ministry** is about helping an inquirer, one interested in seeking God in this monastic community, to find the “right” path. It is journeying with a woman interested in religious life, helping her find her way, wherever it may lead.

The initial inquiry stage is the time when a woman requests information regarding religious life in our Benedictine community. She enters into dialogue with the vocation director through email and phone calls. The director provides reading materials and assists in the woman’s discernment process. It is during this time that the inquirer visits the monastery. The visits allow her to spend time getting to know the community by praying with us, experiencing our community life, and learning about our Benedictine ministries.

The inquiry stage has no set time length. It is a period for reflection and discernment, for questioning and learning. It provides the opportunity for a woman to hear Benedict say through the Rule: “Listen carefully, my daughter, to my instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from one who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice.” (Rule of Benedict Prologue: 1-2)

**Sister Marilyn hears from women who risk answering God’s call:**

After viewing your website, I decided to step out in faith and write, inquiring about your Benedictine Order. Your charism and corporate commitment statement tugged at my heartstrings.
— 50 years old, Annapolis, MD

I have been thinking about religious life for a long time but other commitments kept me from pursuing the dream. I found the Benedictine Sisters of Erie on the web and instantly felt a connection.
— 45 years old, Indianapolis, IN

Could I possibly be called to religious life? Whether I am or not I know I must respond to the questions pestering my spirit. Who knows where it will lead? For now, talking with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie feels right and good.
— 30 years old, Miami, FL

**Permanent Vowed Membership**

Many women seeking permanent membership in religious communities today are professionals who long for a life that follows the Gospel of Jesus. They come from varied backgrounds and share the common desire to seek God and change the world. Are you one of these women?

Contact Sister Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director, for more information or a conversation about your calling.
Phone: 814-899-0614, ext. 2424
Email: vocations@mtstbenedict.org

It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.
—Ernest Hemingway
Alyssa Harpst and Carrie Parsons brought their year to a close at the end of July. They are both presently employed at the St. Benedict Child Development Center. Recently, they embraced the Oblate Way of Life as initiates and continue their relationship with the community. They are members of the monastery’s Sunday worshipping community and frequent visitors to the Mount.

It was a blessing for me to spend a year living at the Mount as a participant in the Benedicta Riepp Program. My experiences and all the memories from this year will surely follow me as I continue on this journey called life. I can see and feel the growth in myself, and it is because of this Benedictine community that I am a stronger, more confident, more loving woman today.

— Alyssa Harpst

It’s hard to express my sincere gratitude to the sisters for opening their hearts and their home to me in a most profound way. It was a fast year full of happy memories and experiences that I will cherish my whole life. I have truly been touched by the love and spirit of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

— Carrie Parsons

After living with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie as participants in the Benedicta Riepp Monastic Experience Program the “Rieppers” have moved on — but not too far! Glory Piovarcy chose to finish her monastic experience in May. She has taken up residence at Benetwood Apartments and remains connected to the community as an Oblate. Glory regularly joins the community for prayer and Eucharist and volunteers in some of the community’s ministries.

“As a participant in the Benedicta Riepp program I was opened to the Benedictine characteristics of hospitality, global awareness, inclusiveness and ministry to women, children and the marginalized. I am so grateful.”

— Glory Piovarcy

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
Alternative spring break ministry trips have grown in popularity and college students around the country elect to forgo their winter and spring breaks to focus on serving their neighbor and making a difference in the world. The Benedictine Sisters of Erie and their inner-city ministries have become a destination choice for several colleges, developing relationships with them along the way. This year, for the first time, we welcome students from the University of Dayton, Ohio. Campus minister, Kelly Adamson, also one of our Oblates, was the first to initiate alternative break ministry trips to Mount St. Benedict Monastery when she was in campus ministry at Ohio Wesleyan University. Although Kelly now ministers at Dayton, Ohio Wesleyan continues to foster their relationship with the Erie Benedictines. The community welcomes students and their adult companions in 2013:

January: Canisius College, New York — Winter Break
March: Ohio Wesleyan University, Ohio — Spring Break
April: Canisius College, New York — Spring Break
May: University of Dayton, Ohio — Semester End

College students are hungry for the God-life, but often they don’t know how to begin, or they see only one side of it. An experience at Mount Saint Benedict Monastery with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie gives them a taste of life as it can be: holy and ordinary, broken and blessed. In short, introducing college students to this community is one of the greatest gifts I think I can give them.

There are so many gifts and graces to experience at the Mount – prayer, lectio, community, faith that does justice, to name only a few. It is a place where faith is palpable: it is alive and in the air from the prayer in the chapel to meeting Jesus in the guest and finding Jesus in the needy, to realizing one’s own neediness in the silence of the monastic cell (bedroom). Bringing college students to the monastery opens them to the truth that prayer and work for justice are not simply related, they are each essential to the search for God.

Living in this community, even if only for a week, students learn what authentic welcome and acceptance is — and they find themselves challenged to treat others the same when they return to campus. I look forward to connecting yet another group of young adults to the sisters at the Mount. It has made such a difference in many students’ lives over the years, and I pray it continues to do so for years to come.

—Kelly Adamson, Oblate, Adult Advisor, Alternative Break Ministry Trips

For more information...
Contact: Sister Marilyn Schauble, OSB, Vocation Director
Phone: 814-899-0614, ext. 2424
Email: vocations@mtstbenedict.org
Marking a combined 100 years of monastic profession, this year’s jubilee celebration transformed a September Saturday into a day of glorious celebration. Golden Jubilarian, Sister Theresa Zoky, and Silver Jubilarians, Sisters Anne McCarthy and Elizabeth Adams, were feted by community members, oblates, family and friends at a festive Evening Prayer during which they renewed their monastic profession. Once again they promised stability, conversion (fidelity) to the monastic way of life and obedience. As they had done 25 and 50 years ago, they again proclaimed the suscipe: “Uphold me, O God, according to Your word and I shall live; and do not fail me in my hope.” (Psalm 119:116)

For the Benedictine community, Jubilee is a reminder that monastic profession is a promise to be on a constant journey of seeking God. Monastics live together to support and encourage one another. They are on a journey — a journey that is individual and equally communal. Because a life-long commitment to prayer is cherished, jubilee day is sacred. Because a life overflowing in a wide variety of works and forms of service is valued, jubilee day is real. Because joy in community life is reverenced, jubilee day is a true celebration of life.
Sisters Dona Obenrader, Cecilia Sullivan and Mary Louis Eichenlaub renewed their monastic profession at Evening Prayer on the occasion of their 60th anniversary of monastic profession. The celebration continued after prayer with a special dinner that included the sharing of many memories born of a lifetime of shared life in community.
Monasteries of the Heart

By Mary Ellen Plumb, OSB

Monasteries of the Heart (MOH), an online and on-site monastic movement for lay people begun by the Erie Benedictines in 2011, unfolds the presence of God and in so doing, transforms itself as well — from an idea and a hope to a growing, dynamic movement full of energy and soul-searching and life-changing moments connecting seekers of God around our world in a common quest. It underlines the truth that there is a common, deeply human hunger and longing for God for which the monastic way of life has an answer. Here, in the many individuals who visit and gather at monasteriesoftheheart.org and in MOH on-site communities around the world, is the presence of God, alive and well. Here individuals see one another, at least in glimpses, the way God sees each. For one individual MOH member, “It is like admiring a beautiful mosaic, realizing the significance and unique value each individual piece has for the whole of the mosaic and knowing without a doubt that every individual in our MOH community is in my life and on my path for a God-ordained reason.”

Interviews with MOH community leaders are featured on the MOH website’s Community page. I recently interviewed Pat, leader of an on-site MOH community, and her poignant sharing reminded me of why I wanted to be so actively engaged in this evolving community ministry.

“One of our members lost her husband and I was moved by the response of our community members — the level of compassion and empathy and the measure by which we upheld her in her pain was at a deeper level, a more profound level than I believe it would have been without our growth as an MOH community,” Pat told me. “It made me realize more fully that what we are doing together is so much more than a book discussion or even a deeply meaningful spiritual conversation. It is a life change, a way of walking together and being within one another’s lives — we are creating together from individual realities a true community.”

Monasticism is a powerhouse of grace whose witness is the transformation of souls and societies by a God who seeks us even as we ourselves are seeking God — it begs to be shared, to be passed on to any and all who share that same longing for God. Pat’s profound testimony was recalling for me the hope and the passion that Monasteries of the Heart has become for so many, myself included.

Transformation defines the monastic way of life. By its basic commitments: a listening heart, conversion of heart, stability of heart, Monasteries of the Heart is a vibrant invitation to individuals of faith everywhere to change daily, to grow deeply into the heart of God, to live more gently with ourselves and God’s people, to embrace more fully the Gospel and its challenge to live as Jesus lived.

You are invited to join Monasteries of the Heart: visit monasteriesoftheheart.org for complete information on how to become a member, including technical helps for those who have less experience online.
It was a day filled with sunshine, a day filled with wonder, a day filled with beauty—it was the day the Poetry Park was dedicated.

Friends, benefactors, neighbors, and children gathered to celebrate the blessing of the Poetry Park located in the 600 block of East 22nd Street. The festivities began with an hour of poetry reading that brought moments of reflection, occasional tears and lots of smiles. Gratitude was expressed to all who made the park possible and the space was dedicated as a peaceful haven, a safe space, a place for respite, an area where beauty resides.

The Poetry Park is the work of Benedictine Sisters Mary Lou Kownacki, Mary Miller, Mary Ellen Plumb and Anne McCarthy, who bring a Benedictine presence to an impoverished area that continues to grow into a neighborhood because of their interest, effort and commitment. Under the auspices of Trinity Square Foundation, a non-profit organization formed to reclaim the neighborhood, this special mission was begun and continues.

When asked why a Poetry Park, Sister Mary Lou answered simply with a quote from Maya Angelou: “A bird doesn’t sing because it has an answer. It sings because it has a song.” The Poetry Park, a dream realized, provides a place where children can be their true selves; where they can, in Sister Mary Lou’s words, “celebrate the spark of the Divine that dwells within them.”

If the dedication was any indication, the Poetry Park has already become a space where the children can and will celebrate the silent center of their own souls, the gifts of their person and presence that make them who they are. As one child so beautifully recited in the words of an anonymous Bhuti Indian:

**All around me quiet.**

**All around me peaceful.**

**All around me beautiful.**

**All around me home.**
Abou Ben Adhem

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,
And to the Presence in the room he said
“What writest thou?”—The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered “The names of those who love the Lord.”
“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not so,”
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerly still, and said “I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow men.”
The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night
It came again with a great wakening light,
And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,
And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.

—James Henry Leigh Hunt

Mary, Ben Adhem and the Angel

By Miriam McMullin-Pastrick, OSB

There’s something about fourth grade. There’s something about fourth grade and Mary William Hoffman. There really is something about fourth grade, Mary William Hoffman, and memorizing poetry — especially the poem “Abou Ben Adhem” by James Henry Leigh Hunt. Sister Mary William Hoffman, now known as Sister Mary by the people who are blessed to encounter her in rural ministry, was our fourth grade teacher — our most wonderful fourth grade dream teacher. One of the activities we all enjoyed was memorizing and reciting poetry one-by-one. There were several: The Children’s Hour, Excelsior, October, Gordon Gustavus Gore and, of course, our favorite, Abou Ben Adhem.

There is also something about poetry memorized in the fourth grade because upon inquiry I discovered that most of us can still recite this entire poem on request without hesitation or any prompting or review.

I’m not exactly sure why this was our favorite then or why we still remember every word because that was well over fifty years ago, but I suspect it had something to do with the poem’s story line. It’s rather mesmerizing to fourth graders to read about someone, in this case, Abou Ben Adhem, waking up from a peaceful dream and finding someone, namely “an angel writing in a book of gold.” Even more astounding to us was the fact that Abou Ben Adhem and the angel conversed. Abou Ben Adhem wasn’t going to let this vision disappear without discovering what was being written and to whom. After all, it was his private bedroom.

And so he inquired, “What writest thou?” The angel was recording the names of people who loved their creator and Ben Adhem’s name wasn’t listed. Well, this didn’t make him particularly delighted; so, rather than be left out entirely, Ben Adhem asked to be listed as someone who loved the people he encountered in his life. This was enough for the angel who then departed, but not for long. Returning again the next night in most brilliant light the angel displayed a new list of those blessed by their creator; and, of course, Ben Adhem’s name “led all the rest.”

In this New Year, may you become the angel recording in your book of gold the names of those you bless with compassionate good works. May you write stories of justice and peace extended especially to women and children. And, of course, like Ben Adhem, may you be especially blessed.

Sisters Mary Hoffman and Miriam McMullin-Pastrick
Book Review:

Old Monk by Mary Lou Kownacki, OSB

By Linda Romey, OSB

As a middle-aged woman but a still a young monk, Old Monk’s fifty years in the monastery and “bagful of poems” call me to authenticity. Old Monk is Sister Mary Lou Kownacki, poet and elder who has spent her life seeding beauty, loving children and working for peace and justice.

Old Monk is also the title of Sister Mary Lou’s newest poetry book, published this fall by Benetvision.

As I sit with the poems of Old Monk for my morning lectio (slow, prayerful, meditative reading), my soul is stretched I am challenged to live with the same honesty as Old Monk.

“The poems in Old Monk are inspired by Han-shan, a 9th century Chinese poet and recluse, whose poems are collected in the classic book, Cold Mountain. For my morning spiritual practice, I read a poem from Cold Mountain, reflected on it, and then wrote my own poem and short commentary in response,” says Sister Mary Lou of the new collection. Her other books include A Monk in the Inner City: The ABCs of a Spiritual Journey (Orbis), Between Two Souls: Conversations with Ryokan (Eerdmans) and an eBook, The Blue Heron and 37 Other Miracles (Benetvision).

Sister Mary Lou is currently the director of Monasteries of the Heart, a new online monastic movement, author of the blog “Heart of the Matter” at monasteriesoftheheart.org, and director of Benetvision Publishing.

From Old Monk:
Old Monk has spent fifty years in the monastery. She is left with a life of good deeds, at least three friends to carry her casket a bagful of poems and a nagging ache that she chose the wrong road when she left father and mother for some sake or other.

I was talking with a sister who was leaving the community and she asked me, “Don’t you ever think about leaving?” I looked at her and smiled, “I think about it every day.” There must be someone out there—a wife, an executive, an artist, a husband, you—who also wonders, “Did I make the right choice? Is my life worth anything? What if…” I have a friend who says, “It’s not why you came to the monastery that counts, it’s why you stayed.” Oh well, as my dying father said when I went to check to see if he was breathing, “I’m still here.”

Old Monk is available from Benetvision, call 814-459-5994 or visit benetvision.org, or at Chapter 57, the monastery gift shop.
Sister Pat Lupo is surrounded by community members and family who celebrated with her on this very special occasion.

Sister Pat Lupo Receives Environmental Leadership Award

Sister Pat Lupo was a recent recipient of the John C. Oliver Environmental Leadership Award. This award is named for the first Pennsylvania secretary of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, chair of the Friends of TREC (Tom Ridge Environmental Center) Board, and a lifelong leader in the environmental field. The award honors individuals like Sister Pat who exemplify environmental leadership in northwest Pennsylvania.

Sister Pat, former program director of Environment Erie’s Earth Action program and now staff member and teacher at the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, is well known for her passionate work on behalf of the environment. She is integrally involved with many environmental organizations at local, state and national levels and untiring in her efforts to educate people of all ages to care for the earth by making changes in practice and policy.

In her acceptance remarks Sister Pat expressed her belief that “leaders are catalysts for change. They know that one person can make a difference and they instill [that] desire in others.”

“We thank Sister Pat for her leadership and for the desire that she instills in us,” said prioress, Sister Anne Wambach. “She continues to make us proud and desirous of upholding our commitment to working for sustainability.”

Hildegard Herstory

Twelfth century Benedictine Abbess Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), having been declared a saint by equivalent canonization on May 10, 2012, was named Doctor of the Church on October 7. Equivalent canonization means that veneration of the saint is already well established in Church traditions, but for various reasons the formal process of canonization had not been completed. The honor of being named “Doctor of the Church” is reserved to those who have made significant contributions to the Church’s tradition.

Until 1970, no woman had been named a doctor in the church. Hildegard now joins three other women who have been bestowed with this title: Saints Teresa of Avila and Catherine of Sienna in 1970, and Thérèse of Lisieux in 1997. In his homily to mark this moment, Pope Benedict acknowledged Hildegard as a woman who showed herself to be “a woman of brilliant intelligence, deep sensitivity and recognized spiritual authority… [God] granted her a prophetic spirit and fervent capacity to discern the signs of the times…”

In celebration of Hildegard, Sisters Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, Jean Wolbert and Margaret Zeller presented a creative overview of Hildegard’s life and her varied contributions to church and society during a special Evening Praise. Through story-telling, song and prayer, more than 100 guests and sisters learned about Hildegard, a truly remarkable woman of her time, and celebrated her legacy: that of mystic, doctor, healer, artist, author, poet, pharmacist, preacher, counselor, dramatist, linguist, naturalist, philosopher, physician, political consultant, prophetess, visionary, and a composer of music. It is a legacy based on a simple belief that Hildegard embodied: “For becoming fruitful as a result of a gift is the only gratitude for the gift.”
Everything on Earth is Filled with Sacred Presence

Formation in the monastic community is a lifelong process that takes place in the very center of the community’s life. The community’s “October Weekend,” a long-standing practice of gathering at the monastery for education and meetings, provides that opportunity for both sisters and oblates. This October the presenter was Toni Nash, CSJ, who spoke on “Earth Learnings: Identity, Difference, Communion.” During the past 30 years, Toni has given workshops and retreats in Earth Spirituality and the New Cosmology, focusing on the beauty and challenge of living in harmony with the Universe.

In expressing gratitude to Toni for her sharing, Sister Stephanie Schmidt, Director of Monastic Formation, summarized the content of Toni’s sessions:

Thank you for calling us to reflect on God’s primary revelation in the universe and to align ourselves with this divine order. You have challenged us to understand that:

• Differentiation is essential to our development and so we must enhance, rather than simply tolerate, the differences among us.

• Each person’s interior life is essential to the growth of the community so each of us is responsible for deepening our interiority to further that growth.

• Everything is connected so we are called to live in right relationship with everyone and everything so that we can truly be in communion with all creation.

Alzheimer’s Education Session

Nancy Hartsfield, RN, Director of Health Services at Mount St. Benedict Monastery, arranged for an Alzheimer’s education session for the community. Debbie Wisinski from the Alzheimer’s Association of Erie presented “The 10 Warning Signs of Alzheimer’s.” The goal of her input was to provide a better understanding of a disease that afflicts approximately 5.4 million people nationwide, with 5.2 million of them age 65 and older. Debbie has worked for the Alzheimer’s Association for five years and her experience allowed her to promote a clearer understanding of the disease and provide helpful tips for those who might find themselves in a caregiver situation.

Sisters Receive TDU Volunteer of the Year Award

Sisters Carol Ann McLaughlin and Rita Groner recently received the Volunteer(s) of the Year Award given by Therapy Dogs United (TDU). With their dog, Rusty, they have been involved in therapy dog work for the past four years.

In their ministry, Rusty, Sister Carol Ann and Sister Rita focus mainly on the elderly and they are frequent visitors to St. Mary’s East (Adult Day Care) and St. Mary’s Asbury Ridge. They also visit Mount Saint Benedict Infirmary, the infirmary of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the Millcreek Hospital Transitional Care Unit. In addition, every Thursday evening they join other dog handlers at Barnes and Noble to greet and share their dogs with children and adults who visit the store. Twice a month they participate in a program at the Blasco Library in which high-risk children read to Rusty and other dogs. This volunteer activity is what led to this very special award.

As Patricia Van Zandt Christianson, Executive Director and Founder of TDU said, “What a well-deserved honor for two outstanding ladies!”
While your picture may not appear on these pages, it is clear that YOU, our friends, relatives, oblates, donors, and all who are part of this Benedictine Community are a vital part of building a world where “All are to be greeted as Christ.”

Rule of Benedict

Imagine the world we would live in if we really did see Christ in everyone. Idealistic nonsense some might say … impossible! Pie in the sky! Naive! How many times have you heard this? I know I’ve heard these sentiments many times. But at Christmas don’t most of us, even the most hardened cynics, believe in the possibility of hope? Don’t most of us, for at least one day in the year, believe in a perfect love brought into the world by a helpless child born into poverty?

I hear many people say, “I can’t do anything to help; I’m just an ordinary person in an ordinary job; I can’t give much; I have nothing to offer; one person can’t make any difference.” But as Sister Joan Chittister says, “It is labor’s transfiguration of the commonplace, the transformation of the ordinary that makes co-creators of us all.”

I know you are one of our co-creators not only because you have stood by this community, but also because you have been steadfast in your support. Your financial gifts, friendship, and endless volunteer hours make you a crucial part of bringing Christmas to those who need help 365 days of the year.

You are steadfast in your support whether it’s …
- purchasing a new refrigerator for the monastery when the ancient one suddenly breaks down;
- helping to do dishes after a large public function;
- helping a child at the Art House learn a musical instrument;
- ministering and participating at Liturgy;

Thank you…for being co-creators of the Benedictine Vision

By Jo Clarke, Oblate, Director of Annual Giving
• helping to organize a retreat;
• preparing and planning the daily meals for sisters and guests;
• working on a presentation for the sisters;
• pledging a monthly gift for the community’s greatest needs;
• collecting clothes and toys for needy children at Christmas;
• writing a book on Benedictine life.

Some of our jobs, ministries and support may seem small and mundane, some exciting and glamorous, but all are equally important. If we really believe that all are to be greeted as Christ, we can experience Christmas Day in those around us: in the ordinary people we meet; in the ordinary work we do; in the ordinary lives we lead. Together with the sisters we can do amazing things!

This Christmas you can choose to be a co-creator in a number of ways.

Volunteer at one of our ministries
Some of our ministries featured in this magazine need volunteers. If you think you might have the time and interest to help, please contact the ministry in which you are interested for more details. Find contact information at ErieBenedictines.org/ministries.

Join our Annual Giving Program
Perhaps you’ve been touched by a story in this magazine and would like to financially support a particular ministry or help the sisters in the mundane but necessary aspects of co-creation like paying the electric bill. Remember, every gift is important, large or small. I know you’ve heard it before but many $1 gifts build up to a large gift and are received with gratitude by the sisters.
Give an Alternative Christmas Gift

Haven’t you sat there after receiving a Christmas gift from a dear friend and you “ooh and aah” about it but you can’t imagine what they were thinking when they bought it for you?

A charitable gift in honor of an important person in your life, a friend, family member, or deceased loved one is a great way to give a meaningful gift this Christmas. I know that many of my friends and I are doing this more and more. Apart from anything else it’s easy for you to purchase. A card will be sent to the person, or family of the person, in whose name the gift is given. This card does not include the amount of your gift. You, the donor, will receive a separate acknowledgement for your records.

Be a part of the co-creation of the future …

Join the Benedictine Sisters of Erie Legacy Society

Your dreams and hopes for the future can continue by remembering the Benedictine Sisters of Erie in your will. A bequest can help the sisters meet unforeseen needs and respond to these ever-changing times in the years to come.

THANK YOU

THANK YOU for continuing to provide the financial resources and support needed to bring Christmas 365 days of the year to this community, city, nation, and world.

THANK YOU for being a part of the Benedictine Family.

The sisters give thanks for you every Sunday at Liturgy.

If you would like to give a gift today or want more information on ways to partner with the sisters, complete the remittance envelope enclosed with this magazine or visit ErieBenedictines.org.

Remember, every gift to the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Inc. is tax deductible.
The year 2013 will mark the 25th year since Saint Benedict Academy closed. As we prepare to commemorate this event, it is helpful to take stock of our Alumnae Association, who we are, how, what and why we do what we do. What is the SBA Spirit of today and what does it represent?

As an Association, we are committed to offering our support to the Benedictine Sisters. The sisters’ life of prayer and ministry personify the transforming presence of God in today’s world. With our prayers, our presence and our financial support, we join with the sisters as they respond to the needs of all of God’s people.

We are a group of approximately 3,200 alumnae members, with members in most of the 50 states. We continue to be the major group of financial supporters of the Benedictine Sisters. In 2011 alumnae members contributed over $91,200 to the sisters and their ministries. We take our commitment seriously and are always striving to do as much as we can in our efforts to support the Benedictine community. We are grateful for what we have received and privileged to give back what we can. We continue to promote Catholic education and are true to the philosophy of our own Benedictine education—to develop our potential, build community and offer our gifts for others.

We have always been a very social group, bonded together by our mission of support to Benedictine Sisters and their ministries. We value our connection to one another and celebrate it whenever possible. We offer our help and have fun in the process. The last year’s social events prove this point.

We partied, we brunched, and then we partied again! We celebrated Christmas at the Ambassador Conference Center with 450 of our closest friends. We dined in style, laughed with our friends and took chances on over 60 beautiful theme baskets. The Party Committee, members of the Class of 1972, provided us with a wonderful evening. We raised over $6,000 for the Saint Benedict Child Development Center.

In the spring we held the Annual Communion Brunch at the Lawrence Park Golf Club with 60 more of our closest friends. We awarded $4,000 in scholarships to students who are relatives of alumnae attending Catholic schools this school year.

In June we picnicked with over 60 of our other closest friends at Glinodo Conference Center. We raised money for the scholarship fund and dined in style once again. It brought back many good memories. People were even signing their old yearbooks. Imagine!

We walked in the “Relay for Life” to support The American Cancer Society. Most astonishing of all, we traveled back in time to celebrate Christmas in July as we “Walked the Halls” of SBA once again. Over 100 alumnae members and some former faculty members reunited at SBA to walk the halls. Some alumnae brought spouses and children with them. Admission to the event was a gift of money or clothing for children who live in poverty and are remembered by the Benedictine Sisters at their Christmas giveaway in December. What a success that was! Over nine huge boxes of clothing and $300 in cash were donated. Old friends reunited, cameras were clicking and hugs were passed around as we met with yet another of our 100 closest friends and faculty members.

It is safe to say, the “Spirit of SBA” is alive and well. Bless all who continue to make this a reality.
A Very Special Announcement

At class reunions, Alumnae functions, or with “club girls”, we share so many fond memories of SBA. It’s hard to believe that June 2013 will mark 25 years since our beloved Academy changed from an all-girls high school to St. Benedict Education Center, serving the critical educational and re-training needs of Erie’s inner-city unemployed and immigrants.

But, the Spirit of SBA has lived on in our friendships and the 3,200 Alumnae who continue to support the sisters and their ministries.

To commemorate our past, celebrate our present, and anticipate our future, we are holding a very special event, a Spring Luncheon, to be held Saturday, June 1 from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. at the Ambassador Conference Center. The day will begin with lunch and a video presentation. A tour of St. Benedict Education Center will follow for those wishing to travel down Peach Street to the school.

It will be a wonderful opportunity to learn more about what’s happening now, and what is being planned for the future, especially if you have not had the opportunity to visit St. Benedict Education Center in recent years.

Watch the mail! For this year only, the Luncheon will replace the Spring Brunch and Summer Picnic. More information, including our Scholarship nomination forms, will be coming in the mail as plans are finalized.

— Janet Hammond ’67

SBA Alumnae Annual Campaign — 2012

Despite the uncertain financial times, SBA Alumnae continue to be a major support group of the Benedictine Sisters. Over the years we have helped the sisters to build the Monastery, renovate the Monastery, build the SBA building, start the programs at St. Benedict Child Development Center, the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, Emmaus Soup Kitchen and Kid’s Cafe, St. Benedict Community Center and St. Benedict Education Center. We thank all who have already given and encourage those who have not to still consider giving a gift.

Mark Your 2013 Calendar

Saturday  May 4  Spring Luncheon & Marketplace
Ambassador Conference Center  10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Sunday  May 5  Sunday Liturgy & Reception
Mount Saint Benedict Monastery  9:30 a.m.

Tuesday  December 3  SBA Christmas Party
Ambassador Conference Center

Reunions

Classes planning reunions are eligible to receive $35 to help defray announcement mailing costs. We will also provide an updated class list from our database. We ask that you provide us with new or corrected addresses and any pictures from your reunion to post on our website. It is one of the best ways we have to keep in touch with friends and classmates. Please contact Ann Comstock at sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org or 814-899-0614 ext. 2573 for help.

Visit ErieBenedictines.org/sba-alum for event updates and to download sign-up forms, or send your email address to Alumnae Liaison 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 E Lake Rd, Erie, PA, 16511. And whenever you see or hear about SBA alumnae being honored or highlighted for their achievements, let us know. Clip and send us an article or jot it down and call us, so we can share the news with all our members.

Call for Email addresses…

We frequently alert Alumnae Association members of upcoming events as well as timely news items. We need your current email address for this. Please send email information as we as your current home address and phone number to Ann Comstock at sbaalum@mtstbenedict.org.
**SBA Christmas Party (2011)**

We wish you a Merry Christmas!

It has been such an enjoyable dinner!

What a terrific evening!

President and Prioress share a moment!

Laughter: the shortest distance between people!

**Summer Picnic (2012)**

We're glad to have the chance to do some catching up!

It's great to be here!

**Walk the Halls (2012)**

Sister Rosanne Loneck is excited to see alum.

Isn't this adorable!

Sister Christine Vladimiroff (center) welcomes alum.
Like incense, the prayers and good wishes of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie rise before God with joy and thanksgiving for the blessing of support, friendship and care that you so generously extend.

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

May the presence of God that Christmas celebrates fill your heart and your home with peace throughout this holy season and in the new year to come.