

Tidings

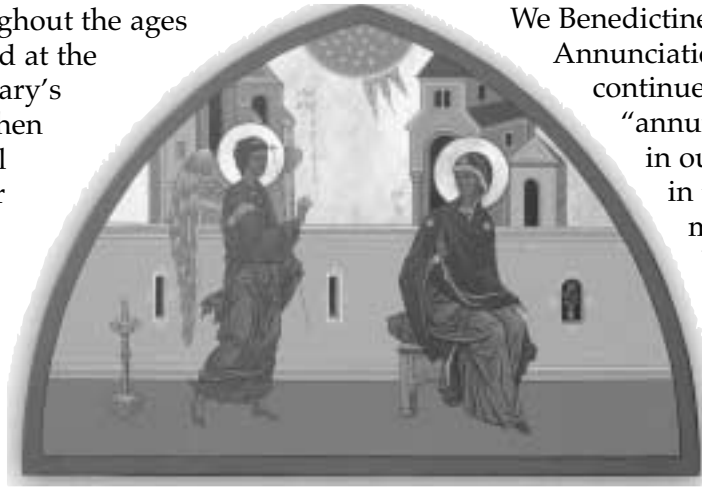
BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF

ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

SPRING 2005

www.annunciationmonastery.org

PEOPLE throughout the ages have marveled at the Blessed Virgin Mary's trust and faith when the Angel Gabriel announced to her that she was favored by God and chosen to carry God's Son. Her answer, "may it be done to me," was a moment of "Annunciation" that called her to set her own fears and uncertainties aside and walk in faith according to God's plan. We, too, are called to listen to and answer God's call in our own moments of "annunciation."



Annunciation icon by Sister Mary Charles McGough hangs in the gathering space of Annunciation Monastery. Photo: Greg Becker

We Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery continue to respond to "annunciation moments" in our personal lives and in the ministries of our monastic community. We follow the path of our founders who said yes to an invitation to establish a new foundation in Bismarck. It was a day of celebration when it received papal approval on

March 24, 1947, the eve of the feast of the Annunciation of Mary.

In this *Tidings* some of our sisters share their own "annunciation moments."

Annunciation Moments

I BELIEVE there are "annunciation moments" over the course of our lifetime. But, unless we are aware of such encounters, they go unnoticed.

One of the most profound and confirming "annunciation moments" for me occurred 15 years ago. I had a mastectomy for the removal of an aggressive type of cancer. It was the third day after surgery and the doctor came to remove the bandages. I was determined not to look at the surgical site until I got home but the doctor wanted me to learn how to strip the drainage tubes. With one glance I felt devastated. I burst into loud sobbing. Moments later when I was alone, I made the silent cry, "God, I don't know how I can live with this. You have to help me!"

Following my cry, I heard and felt the words, "Body of Christ," resound throughout my being. My faith was greatly strengthened and I was given the ability to accept what was previously too overwhelming. Upon reflection of my experience, I realized the communion minister had come at precisely at the time of my prayer.



Sister Agnes Reinert

Sister Agnes Reinert

More annunciation moments on page 3

MESSAGE FROM THE *Prioress*



Dear Friends,

FOR readers of *Tidings* who have not visited Annunciation Monastery, the bell banner is the strongest visual symbol for our monastic community. The bell banner stands 100 feet tall, deeply rooted in the prairie soil as Benedictine sisters have been rooted in Bismarck for 127 years. People are often surprised when they see the straight, tall banner on the much flatter prairie. They are surprised to feel the power and vibrations when they first hear the bells ring.

Bells announce the most important events in a community's life. For us at Annunciation, the bells call the community to prayer. When the three bells ring together, they announce a joyful event like a jubilee or a profession. When the largest bell tolls alone, it announces the death of a sister or a tragedy in our world.



Bell banner of Annunciation Monastery stands tall on the prairie

The bells call us to be faithful to community prayer. They also proclaim to all who hear them that the community of Benedictine sisters on the hill are a faithful presence of prayer.

This issue of *Tidings* explores the theme, annunciation. We think first of Mary's annunciation when God sent the angel Gabriel to her. The angel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus. We know that Mary was perplexed at first, but Gabriel reassured her not to be afraid, God was with her. After further conversation, Mary responded, "Here am I...let it be with me according to your word." Gabriel then left her. Undoubtedly Mary was caught off guard when Gabriel first came. She must have been grounded in strong faith to respond as completely as she did at that moment.

We find encouragement and courage from Mary in her thinking, questions, faith, and response. Through Mary's undaunted faith, we begin to ask ourselves questions. "Does God send messengers to us? What does God ask of us?" We pray that we have Mary's faith and courage to respond, "Here am I...let it be with me according to your word."

The angel Gabriel announced a message to Mary that enabled her to give us Jesus, God's beloved Son. The bells announce an invitation and commitment to prayer. As we reflect on what occurs in our own lives everyday, we become increasingly aware that God speaks often, and we desire to hear and respond in such a way that we live God's word.

With gratitude, we sisters of Annunciation share some of our "annunciation" stories. We invite you to reflect on your "annunciation" moments. God speaks. Let us listen.

Sister Susan Berger

Annunciation Moments



Sister Eleanor Stockert

God Knows What's Best

A TIME of annunciation for me was when Sister Susan Lardy called me at Garrison Memorial Hospital and asked me if I'd do nurse aide work at the monastery. It was a hard decision for me because I had worked at Garrison for five years and liked the people I worked with. But, when I look back, I know God had His hands in it. After working at the monastery for two years as a nurse aide, I started cutting hair, doing errands and learned Tai' Chi Chih for the sake of my health. Now I am an accredited Tai' Chi Chih instructor so I can teach others. Many great things and hard things have happened in my life. When I look back, I realize all happens because God knows what's best for us. Like Rev. Carey Landry's song states, "Great things happen when God mixes with us."

Sister Eleanor Stockert



Sister Eleanor Mischel

Premonition Comes True

WHEN I was about six years old, a missionary priest asked our class, "Who is going to become a sister?" All except two of us responded positively. Ironically we were the only two who eventually became Benedictines. I felt bad that I wasn't a boy so I couldn't become a priest. By the time I was of high school age, I wanted to go to Creighton University to become a doctor. My older sister thought I should be a ballerina! Somehow I knew that sometime, somewhere I would become a sister. When Prior Cuthbert Goeb (later Abbot) preached the high school retreat, he said, "Do now, what on your deathbed, you will wish you had done." That clinched my premonition. After two years at the College of St. Benedict, I entered the Novitiate. (I had not "advertised" my intentions, so some of the priests at Assumption Abbey and my best friends did not know I was becoming a Benedictine.) And, here I am after 70 years!

Sister Eleanor Mischel



Sister Helen Kyllingstad

An Unexpected Summons

ANNUNCIATION! I had spent months of study and prayer and agonizing before becoming a Catholic. I was baptized in the evening, went to confession, and went to Eucharist the next morning. All went well until it came to the Gospel. "One thing yet you lack — go sell all and come and follow me!" I wanted to scream and throw my missal across the church! "Can't you leave me alone one minute, God? Did you have to spring this on me now?" Even as I raved at Him, I knew I was caught and that I'd be a sister before long — in nine months, in fact, is all it was.

Sister Helen Kyllingstad



Sister Gemma Peters

Sickness A Blessing

EXHAUSTED, ached all over, head hurt, but got out of bed. It was Sunday. I managed to get to chapel for prayers but sat in silence. Halfway through prayers I knew if I didn't leave chapel, I would collapse. I made it to a room across from chapel and had to lie down. There a sister found me and helped me to bed. After fighting a high temperature, chills, extreme headache and exhaustion, I was admitted to the hospital. For two days doctors were in and out, blood drawn many times a day, scans, x-rays, tests of all kinds taken. Received good care but no answers. I remember lying in bed so exhausted and head aching and saying, "God, here I am. Your will be done." Somehow I knew doctors would find what was wrong. After three days, a diagnosis was made and treatment began. One side effect was I couldn't sleep, but nights were special. God seemed so close, felt like being held, surrounded by His presence. Body and head still ached, felt exhausted, couldn't eat, walk or do anything but respond to medical requests, but was at peace. Recovery took nearly two years with uncertainties but I knew I would make it. I now look back at this time as a graced time. I view all today in relationship to my illness. My life has a deeper meaning. Each day is a blessing, a gift, with God as my dancing partner leading me in my dance of life.

Sister Gemma Peters



Sister Margaret Nelson

God of Surprises

I HAVE served as monastic secretary for 12 years. This year I thought God should call me to do something different, perhaps more exciting or dramatic, like help the poor more directly or work for social justice,

anything other than clerical work. So I listened and listened. And when I was finally ready to hear what God was saying, this was it: "Margaret, I want you to view your role as monastery secretary, not as a job, but as a ministry to your sisters. I want you to go deeper into my Word, to reach out in love to your sisters and anyone who crosses your path. I don't want you to do anything different; I want you to deepen what you are already doing." What a difference this has made in my life. I feel happier, more free and no longer have to search for my mission in life. The God of surprises told me I am already doing it!

Sister Margaret Nelson



Sister Audrey Martin

Many Beginnings

WHEN our class took our vows and became Benedictine sisters, I was scheduled to go away to continue my education. Instead I was sent to St. Patrick's School in Dickinson to teach the third grade! I had never taught so I was a bit

frightened! However one of the sisters helped me to prepare my daily classes and the principal was also very helpful. I taught there for eight years and when I was given another assignment to teach in Bismarck, I cried all the way there. I taught at a Bismarck grade school and eventually was asked to teach English at St. Mary's High School which I did for a number of years. I also became a counselor there. Then I was asked to be assistant to the Prioress which I did for some time. From there I was asked to set up the archives at St. Alexius Medical Center and later set up the archives at the monastery. Presently I am retired and spend time embroidering and my material is sold at the monastery gift shop.

Sister Audrey Martin



Nancy Gunderson

A Heartfelt "Yes"

I FIND my life has many annunciation moments now that I have made a major life change and moved to a totally new environment. It has been a series of saying "Oh" in

surprise, followed by a "Yes." And one such moment happened for me when I became a postulant of this monastery. Part of the ceremony of entry was to walk up to the front door and knock. As I walked up the sidewalk to a bright slice of moon in the starry sky, the monastery was all lit up. Coming up to the front door, I saw the happy waiting faces of the sisters. A deeper reality of my call and commitment, an "Oh" came to my lips and a heartfelt "Yes" echoed in the depths of my being as my hand raised to knock.

Nancy Gunderson, postulant



Sister Kathryn Zimmer

Three Mile Missionary

HAVING completed 12 years as chair of the University of Mary Nursing Division, getting it accredited by the National League for Nursing, earning some substantial grants and implementing its master's degree program, and after inaugurating a Values

Integration Program at Garrison Memorial Hospital and attaining several sizable grants, I thought of doing work in a foreign mission. Maybe I would go to Belize where it would not be necessary to learn another language. About this same time administrative staff members from United Tribes Technical College came to visit me. Would I consider serving as director of their nursing program? Their director had recently resigned. My prioress saw that I was open to the call. "Go for it," she responded. It proved to be a six-year "annunciation moment" during which we gained a first National League for Nursing accreditation, again earned sizable grant donations, and rejoiced when students passed their state licensure exams. The Native American environment was indeed a foreign mission for me — three miles from my home monastery.

Sister Kathryn Zimmer

Annunciation/Christmas Dates Explained

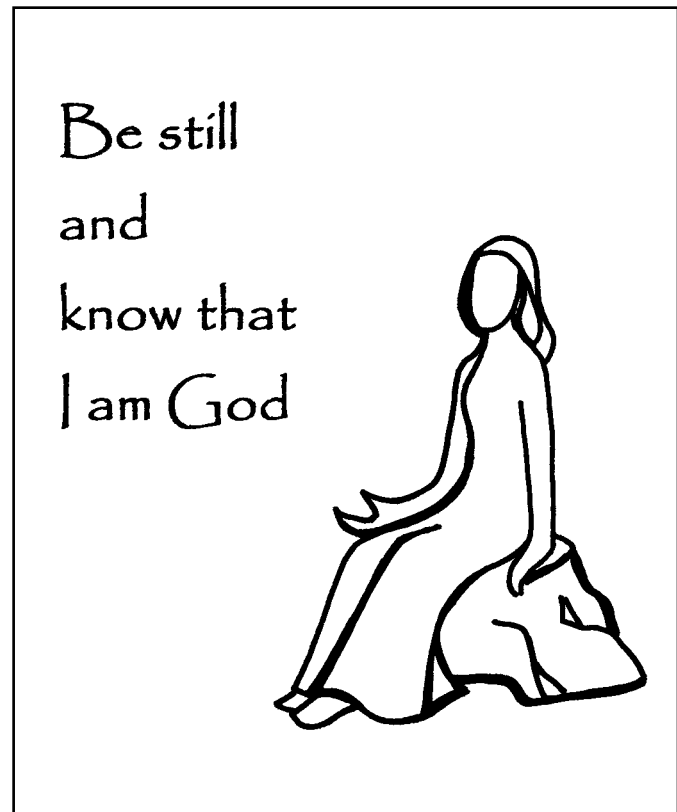
IN ORDER to understand why the date on which we celebrate the feast of the Incarnation is March 25, we must know why the birth of Jesus is December 25.

The Gospels make no mention of a date in their accounts of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem, the city of David, for an imperial census. Historians and other scholars are sure that census-taking in ancient times was never in the winter, for even places close to the Mediterranean are too cold to warrant trips better made at other times.

How then are we to explain our present liturgical calendar, which has two important cycles: Lent-Easter-Pentecost, and Advent-Christmas? The older cycle is, of course, the one involving the Passion and Crucifixion of our Savior, the earliest written section of all four gospels. Observance of the Resurrection, which marked the birth of Christianity in the power of the Spirit, was celebrated centuries before anyone thought of honoring the birth of Christ. In fact, the two Nativity accounts (Matthew and Luke, focused respectively on Joseph and Mary) are later additions to the original texts.

When Church leaders did not know a date, they often proceeded to baptize a pagan celebration. Therefore, they chose to recognize the Messiah's birthday on a great feast in the Roman Empire, the Saturnalia, which honored an ancient deity, Saturn, the Sun-Giver. People believed that the sun was in danger of extinction as winter days grew shorter. But every year, Saturn intervened and revived the great star. Hence, the Romans had a week of feasting and fun—along with religious ceremonies—in the closing days of December to celebrate the new birth of the daylight.

Christians would be apostates if they were to observe the Saturnalia by adoring Saturn. Instead, they were going to honor the earthly birth of the true God, who became incarnate for our salvation. And they would do it on December 25! Therefore, in or about the fourth century, churchmen inserted into the Roman calendar a solemn observance of the Nativity.



Sketch by Sister Edith Selzler

For all the Romans, pagan or Christian, there was joy in the birthday of Light. From that point, it was merely a matter of counting back nine months for Christians to calculate the date of the Annunciation: March 25!

This decision had an enormous effect on calendars: from these early centuries until the year 1752, the British and, of course, their American colonies when they came to be, began the year on March 25, and not January 1. We find this indicated in scholarly writings of the period, which write OS (meaning Old Style) next to dates earlier than April in years affected by the change.

We have no certitude as to when Gabriel made that all-important visit to Nazareth, but it gladdens many hearts to have the event observed liturgically when all of nature is ready to burst into greenness of new life. Maybe it's wise to see in the liturgical feast, not happenstance but Providence.

Mary Elizabeth Mason osb

Annunciation Monastery Oblate update

THE Oblates of Annunciation Monastery respond to the call of St. Benedict to Listen.

Listen is the first word of the Rule of St. Benedict. Oblates strive to be attentive to God's word in the ordinary circumstances of their lives. That means that in all daily activities God's voice may be heard, whether they are providing a meal for their family, driving to work, offering the best service of which they are capable, reading the newspaper, listening to another person, or praying and meditating. Lent is a special time for re-focusing our goodwill to be aware of the presence of God as it comes to us in our interactions with others at work, play and prayer.

At our monthly meetings at the monastery, the oblates have had the opportunity to listen to members of Annunciation Monastery share the fruit of their reflection. For example, Sister Miriam Schmitt brought us to a fuller awareness of Lectio Divina as a means of listening to God's Word. Sister Gemma Peters explained spiritual direction and seeking God and the fact that spiritual direction is offered through the monastery's Hospitality Center. We are deeply grateful to Sister Thomas Welder who presented reflections on the "Return of the Prodigal Son," on March 6.

We are pleased and excited about David Byberg representing us at the first World Congress of



Lynda and Dennis Larkin recently made their oblation at Annunciation Monastery after a study of the Rule of Benedict.

Oblates in Rome in September. Many of you who are readers of *Tidings* supported this experience by your contributions and we thank you.

Sister Stephanie Dolyniuk, assistant oblate director, and I plan to attend the meeting of the North American Association of Oblate Directors in Yankton, S.D. July 29 through Aug. 3. We hope at least one or several of our oblates will join us for that meeting.

Sister Susan Lardy
Oblate Director

What Sisters are Reading

Sister Terence Glum recommends, *"Scattered Shadows: A Memoir of Blindness and Vision,"* by John Howard Griffin. She says, "This compelling story is about a man's experience of losing his eyesight after suffering from head trauma in the war. His interesting life journey teaches him how to live in darkness and develop his gifts more fully."

Sister Gemma Peters says, "A book that has touched me deeply on my spiritual journey was, *"The Dark Night of the Soul,"* by Gerald G. May, M.D. Through the writings of John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila, sixteenth century mystics, May helps us see that when our lives are clouded and full of mystery as we walk through the 'dark night' of vulnerability and powerlessness, emptiness and doubt, a liberation and freedom is

taking place mysteriously, in secret, and beyond our conscious control. He shows how our 'darkness' is vital to the freedom and joy that results from spiritual growth. May also writes how our journey to God is possible even to us stumblers and slow learners of God's ways. I recommend this book to anyone who is serious about spiritual growth."

To read more reviews, see our web site "Reflections" at: www.annunciationmonastery.org

To make a general donation to Annunciation Monastery, please use the enclosed envelope.

Thank you for your support.

Nancy Gunderson Becomes Postulant



Nancy Gunderson (center) enters front door in a ceremony in which she became a postulant of Annunciation Monastery. (L) is Sister JoAnn Krebsbach, affiliate director, and (R) is Sister Susan Berger, prioress.

NANCY Gunderson was welcomed into the Annunciation Monastery community as a postulant on Feb. 10, the Feast of St. Scholastica. A postulant lives with the monastic community to become more familiar with the Benedictine lifestyle by greater participation in common living, prayer and service.

Formerly of Plymouth, Minn., Nancy brings her music and fiber art to Annunciation Monastery where she shares it in liturgical and spirituality center settings. She plays the zither and her fiber art creations include colorful quilts that tell scriptural stories of their own as well as stories drawn from her own personal life journey.

SISTERS RECEIVE HONORS FOR FAITHFUL SERVICE, ACHIEVEMENTS



Sister Gerard Wald

Sister Gerard Wald was honored with the University of Mary 2003-2004 Outstanding Staff Award in recognition of her service to the student body. She is Coordinator of First Year Experience and Director of Student Volunteer Services at the University of Mary.



Sister Thomas Welder

Sister Thomas Welder was recognized for her 40 years of service at the University of Mary. Sister Thomas, president of the University of Mary since 1978, began teaching there in 1963. She has served as assistant director of humanities, director of vocal-choral and keyboard music, chair of the humanities division and director of deferred giving.



Sister Melissa Cote

Sister Melissa Cote recently became certified as a pharmacy technician and is employed at St. Alexius Medical Center as a pharmacy technician. Sister Melissa is continuing her studies in pre-pharmacy.



Sister Kathleen Atkinson

Sister Kathleen Atkinson has been elected as a Co-Chair for Region VIII's National Religious Vocations Conference (NRVC). Region VIII of the NRVC includes the states of Minn., S.D. and N.D. Sister Kathleen, along with Co-Chair Sister Regina Murray, of Sacred Heart Monastery in Richardton, will be responsible for setting up ways in which vocation directors from those states can be available to each other for mutual support and sharing resources.



Sister Donna Johnson

Sister Donna Johnson was recognized for her 25 years of service at the University of Mary where she taught medical-surgical content to nursing students. She continues to teach nursing skills at the University on a part-time basis and is a great fan of the Marauder sports teams.

Tsunami Relief Cards on Sale at Monastery



Artist Sister Edith Selzler shows handcrafted cards available for purchase in the monastery's gift shop. Proceeds go toward tsunami relief efforts.

CARDS made from handmade paper from Thailand are available to purchase in the Annunciation Monastery gift shop.

Artist Sister Edith Selzler incorporated the beautiful textured paper with pressed leaves and flowers to create these cards. Proceeds will go toward tsunami relief efforts.

To purchase these cards, visit the monastery gift shop or call Sister Edith at (701)255-1520.

If you wish to be removed from our mailing list, or if you have a change in address, please notify: Communications Director at the above address. Thank you.

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