



# Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

SUMMER 2017

www.annunciationmonastery.org



*"You would be the first one..."*

## *Sister Nancy Gunderson to Teach Children in Uganda*

Sister Nancy Gunderson pondered those words from Pam Kossan, a University of Mary alumna and nurse who is leading the Mary Mission Team to Uganda. Sister Nancy was taken totally by surprise and didn't think it could be possible, but the words burned in her soul.

"Will you come to Uganda with our mission team and teach for a week in July at St. Philomena Primary School? The school serves five villages with over 800 AIDS orphans. We want a sister to come. They have never experienced a sister. You would be the first one."

"If we can make it happen, will you come?" Kossan repeated. Sister Nancy explained, "Something in me whispered 'yes' not even knowing where that came from, what I was committing to or what could make it possible. I only knew the days and weeks ahead would confirm if that was a real call from the spirit."

*Story continues on page 3*



MESSAGE FROM THE

# Prioress

This year, our monastic community celebrated a significant milestone – 70 years as an independent Benedictine monastery. Benedictine Sisters from St. Joseph, MN, first came to Dakota Territory in 1878. But 1947 is the year our founders officially established their own monastery in North Dakota.

I use a tree as an image to illustrate our community's story. Roots are vital to a tree. They reach out, anchoring the tree to where it is planted, an analogy for our promise of stability. We promise stability to our monastic community for life. We promise to be here to serve the people of this region, for years to come.

In 1878 a small group of sisters arrived on the train to teach school at St. Mary's Academy. The roots grew deeper with the founding of St. Alexis Hospital in 1885 and grew out further as the sisters taught in schools and summer catechism classes throughout western North Dakota.

Bishop Vincent Ryan played a vital role in our history in firmly setting this tree in Bismarck. He realized the advantages for both the diocese and the sisters if they would establish their own motherhouse in the diocese. In late 1943, 141 sisters volunteered for the new foundation in Bismarck. The sisters waited to receive word from the Vatican granting permission for the new foundation. The official document was signed by the pope on March 24, 1947, the eve of the Feast of the Annunciation. The sisters naturally selected a name, the Benedictine Sisters of the Annunciation.

With the new community in the Bismarck diocese, the trunk of our tree grew. New members joined the community, rural hospitals were established, and more schools were staffed by the sisters. The new community needed a larger motherhouse. The sisters acquired the services of Marcel Breuer to be the architect for their project. Bishop Hilary Hacker was now Bishop of Bismarck. He and several businessmen assisted the sisters in finding land south of Bismarck along Apple Creek. The sisters purchased the land and received a gift of 40 acres from Charles Swenson.

Born out of need for a Catholic college, the sisters started Mary College in 1959. We continue to sponsor the University of Mary and CHI St. Alexius Health as the mission is passed on in service to the people of this region and beyond. Our branches carry our heritage and values into new areas of ministry.

Ministry on the Margins was created to serve those who fall through the cracks during times of transition, particularly those recently released from prison. This ministry serves over 500 people a week, offering meals, a food pantry, programs, mentors and fellowship.

As always, we trust that God will be with us as we respond to the needs of the day. We commit to being a prayerful presence on these prairies for years to come; our tree is healthy and it will carry us into our future.

*Sister Nicole Kunze*

"You would be the first one..." (continued from page 1)

Sister Nancy brought the request before the Annunciation Monastery prioress and council. It would be the first step in discernment. "Not expecting their affirmative response, I was again surprised by their 'yes' and even their encouragement," she said. As plans and funds began falling into place, Sister Nancy was reassured that this is where God is leading her.

She will teach at a school named after St. Philomena so she contacted The Universal Living Rosary Association, who take St. Philomena as their patroness, to see if they would be willing to donate 350 medals of St. Philomena and 500 rosaries for the children. They responded with a "yes," and surprised Sister Nancy with a 27-lb. box of everything she requested and more. The local bishop in Uganda will bless the school when Sister Nancy and the mission group are there to dedicate the new church that is currently being built.

"We needed to collect toothbrushes and toothpaste to take to Africa, and it just so happened that a bag of 150 of them was left over from a charity project the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery donated to," explained Sister Nancy.

The children at St. Philomena's need black shoes with laces, as part of their school uniform, so they can trudge through the rough terrain to get from their villages to school. Sister Nancy's family in Minneapolis took her to Once Upon a Child when she was visiting and purchased eight pairs of black shoes for the children. Since then, many more pairs of shoes have been donated.

Sister Nancy, who is also a professor at the University of Mary, talked to Dr. Chad Litton's students about the project. The students promoted, fundraised, applied for a grant and collected shoes.

While in Uganda, she will teach the children about the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sister Nancy is amazed at how the spirit is working as plans fall into place for this new call in her life. "My heart is being converted as I say 'yes' to each step."

"My heart is being converted  
as I say 'yes' to each step."

- Sister Nancy Gunderson



Sister Nancy, a gifted fabric artist, created a story art quilt about the patron saint for whom the school is named, St. Philomena. The quilt depicts St. Philomena holding the school, church and children in her arms. On her dress are the names of the children who will attend the school where Sister Nancy will teach. Sister Nancy will gift the school with this quilt, along with the countless black shoes and white cotton shirts which were so generously donated for the cause. God has surely blessed this mission!

# Sponsorship Formation Day

Our sisters hosted the eighth annual Sponsorship Formation Event for staff from the University of Mary and CHI St. Alexius Health on May 10, 2017. Father Tom Kopfensteiner, the keynote speaker for the day, used stories and art to connect service, mission and sacred encounters with those we serve. Thanks to all who attended this inspirational day of learning and sharing.



*Father Tom Kopfensteiner and the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery.*



*Sisters Nancy Gunderson, Mariah Dietz, and Rosemary DeGracia, and Kurt Schley, president and CEO of CHI St. Alexius Health are ready to distribute the much-anticipated homemade truffles.*

# Sister Barbara Weber Top Donor at United Blood Services

*\*Article reprinted with permission from Inspired Woman Magazine (Women of Generosity), by Marci Narum*

Sister Barbara Weber is no fan of needles. So it might surprise you to know where she spends nearly three hours every Wednesday. Sister Barb has a standing appointment at United Blood Services to donate platelets. “It’s never a burden for her,” says Linda Valentine, Donor Relations Specialist. “The fact that she’s saving lives is a pleasure for her. And having her here is a pleasure for us.”

Sister Barb has been part of the community for 55 years. So has her heart. She began donating blood in 1968. During the 80s she switched to donating platelets, a process that takes about five times longer than donating whole blood. “It’s my civic donation. I don’t do anything else out in the community,” Sister Barb explains. “I can do this and it helps others right away.”

Platelets are tiny blood cells that help the body’s blood form clots. They have a shelf life of only seven days, so donations such as Sister Barb’s are taken to local and state hospitals or flown immediately to other hospitals in United Blood Service’s four-state region, including South Dakota, Montana, and Wyoming.

Sister Barb says donating platelets is a sacrifice she believes can result in a greater benefit. “More people can use the platelets. Surgery patients and cancer patients are the biggest recipients,” she says.

Sister Barb was a social worker at CHI St. Alexius in Bismarck for 39 years and began serving as a chaplain there in 2005, so she often sees patients who need what she has donated. “When I’m at the hospital I wonder if the blood is mine.”

At United Blood Services, the staff never has to wonder if they will see Sister Barb. “She’s here every week,” says Linda. “We make calls every day asking people to come in once every eight weeks. This woman is here every week without ever having to call her.”

And her weekly donations have added up—to a number which no one else at the Bismarck donation center can match or even come close to. “She has donated more than 90 gallons,” says Linda. “Do you know how many donation days and times it takes to do 90 gallons?” The answer is 730 visits. And counting.

“If that isn’t dedication I don’t know what is,” says Linda.

And it’s a lot of needle sticks for someone who is not a fan of them. Sister Barb smiles, “As long as I don’t have to look at the needle I’m okay.”



# What's for Supper?

---

By Sister Hannah Vanorny

I went back to college this past year! Okay, so that is not *exactly* true...I did move into a residence hall on campus, but as a resident sister, not as a student. Last fall, Sister Idelle and I packed our belongings and moved from the monastery, where we usually live, to Roers Hall, a new women's residence on the University of Mary campus. We spent the school year as sisters-in-residence in St. Scholastica Hall, a women's discernment hall within Roers.

Sister Idelle and I did a number of things to be present to the students, but our favorite (and I suspect the students' favorite too) was the weekly meals we had together. Every Thursday evening we invited a few St. Scholastica students and a few sisters from the monastery to join us for supper. We got a list of the students' favorite foods and then tried to cook each woman's favorite when it was her turn to join us for dinner. I should clarify, Sister Idelle cooked the students' favorite foods. I mostly stuck with dessert, baking everything from homemade churros to, quite possibly, the world's gooiest brownies! Nearly everything we made was homemade which delighted the students as it reminded them of the meals they ate back home.

Eating together is important to Benedictine communities. Communal prayer and sharing meals every day helps us grow as a community. Sometimes we engage in vigorous debate and sometimes we simply sit in companionable silence. The conversations and relationships we have developed from years of eating together transform



us daily. Praying and eating together are two of our community's guiding principles which we promise to follow no matter where we are. We pledge to always pray and break bread with one another – break bread both at the Eucharist and at the dinner table. A shared mealtime for us, as ordinary as it may seem, is a sacred time, and we gladly welcome guests to share in that encounter with us.

*"There is something about eating together that provides a freedom of speech and openness that might not happen elsewhere."*

Sister Idelle and I brought these experiences and ideas to our student suppers. And, just like at the monastery, these ordinary meals we shared with students became something more as we enjoyed food and stories together. Sister Idelle and I and the other sisters who attended the suppers got to know the St. Scholastica women on a personal, more intimate basis. During these meals, which often stretched for several hours, we talked with the students about many things. We discussed their families, their majors, their friends, their faith, their fears, their problems and successes at school, and their dreams and hopes for the future. We talked



about books, movies, hobbies, sports, and dorm room decorations. Without these suppers, how we would have ever known that one of our students had been in a life-changing accident? Or that one speaks fluent Spanish? Or that one hopes to be a great lawyer someday? Or that one had gone through such an interesting journey on her way to transferring to the University of Mary?

It was not just the sisters who got to hear good stories during these meals. The students got to hear from the sisters. It was fun to watch our sisters become real people in the students' eyes as they, too, shared their hopes and dreams and life journeys. The age gap between some of our older sisters and the students often provided some interesting conversations. Students could teach the older sisters about things like what "LOL" in texting terms means and, in return, sisters could educate students on topics such as exactly how typewriters work!

There is something about eating together that provides a freedom of speech and openness that might not happen elsewhere. Neither the students nor the sisters would have been as open about sharing some of their deepest thoughts and dreams if they would have been talking, for example, in

a classroom setting. Our eating space perhaps influenced our closeness too, in a rather literal way!

We frequently had from six to nine people squished into our tiny apartment kitchen/living room. We got creative, using the couch for seating, leaving all food dishes on the counter (saving valuable table space), eating in our laps, and trying hard not to drink our neighbor's glass of water or use her fork! I think our cramped space had a secret benefit; it added to the intimacy and sense of shared camaraderie between all of us.

I grew up in a family that ate together most nights and I am only now really starting to appreciate that fact. At those family dinners, I had the opportunity to share my own thoughts and feelings and listen as others shared theirs. I do not think it is too much of a reach to say that if more people ate together, the world might be a better place! There is usually a healthy degree of give and take and attempting to understand others that happens at shared meals. Eating is something all human beings must do to survive, but eating together helps us thrive as we share in God's love for one another over the dinner table.



# Why I Love SILENCE

By Sister Margaret Nelson

I love silence. Yes, silence -- no speaking, no internet, no radio, no TV, no smart phone, just me alone in the silence. Only in silence will I hear the Word of God. Only in stillness of body and mind will I be able to listen to the God within me.

I live with a community of monastic women who value silence and solitude. In our busy, noisy, global-connected world, the opportunity for time and space for silence is one of the great blessings of the consecrated life.

Although Annunciation Monastery sisters are busy serving others in our varied ministries, we also take time to sit in silence and pray, listening for God's voice. Three times a day we gather to pray the Divine Office. This is the prayer of the Church and is Scripture based consisting of hymns, psalms and readings. It is not a rushed or hurried prayer but has a reflective rhythm to it with silent pauses between the psalms to let us ponder what we have heard.

We also are blessed to participate in the daily Eucharist. In the Eucharist we receive the Body and Blood of Christ and listen to the Scripture readings. Silence lets the Word of God sink deep within our being.

Each sister has a private bedroom for privacy and solitude. The bedroom areas of our monastery are quiet, especially at night. We respect each other and try to give each other that time and space to listen to God. Some sisters rise early in the morning and use that time to pray and reflect. Others, like me, take time for the Lord at different times of the day.

I have found that evening is the best time for me to sit in reflective silence with God. I am more alert and awake. Anything on my "to do" list is either finished or can wait until tomorrow making it easier to free myself from distractive thoughts.

Just like good friends and spouses take time to foster their relationships, I take time to grow in my relationship with God. It is the most important part of my day. I turn off the radio, disconnect from the internet, and try to unclutter my mind. I am reminded of Psalm 46 which says, "Be still and know that I am God." In silence I pray the Scriptures of the Eucharist for the next day and if a word touches my heart, I sit with it and let it sink in. Sometimes I hear nothing; other times I do hear God speaking to my heart. I try not to have my own agenda for my conversations with God but wait in stillness for whatever God wants to tell me. Often I am surprised at the message.

*"I try not to have my own agenda for my conversations with God but wait in stillness for whatever God wants to tell me."*

Once on a silent retreat, I woke up at 5 a.m. and a voice inside me said, "Get up, get up, I want to be with you." I was surprised and honored to hear that invitation but since I am definitely not a morning person, I answered "Oh God, it is 5 a.m.; it is too early to get up." But that inner voice persisted, "Get up, get up, I want to be with you." I got up and spent one of the best times with God utterly aware that I was in the Divine Presence.

That is why I love silence. Only in silence do I hear the Voice of God. Only in silence and stillness does my relationship with the Loving God grow and blossom. Try it. You, too, can hear God's voice. Use Scripture as your base; wait in patience and expect surprises.

# Sister Thomas Welder Receives Honorary Doctorate Degree



Sister Thomas Welder was bestowed the highest honor, an honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, by Saint Anselm College, (Manchester, NH) at its May 20 commencement ceremonies. Also honored with doctorate degrees were two other nationally acclaimed Catholic leaders: Bishop Robert Barron, auxiliary bishop of the greater Diocese of Los Angeles; and Dr. Carolyn Woo, former president and chief executive officer of Catholic Relief Services. In 2015 Sister Thomas was awarded her first honorary doctorate degree by Belmont Abbey College, Charlotte, NC.

Sister Thomas is well-known for her dedication to the growth and prosperity of the University of Mary, having served the longest tenure as female president at any college or university in America. She serves as president emerita at the University of Mary and is active in state and national, civic and religious organizations.

*“To have the opportunity to honor such a distinguished person as yourself and to have our students, their families and friends benefit from your life of service is a source of enormous pride and joy for all of us.” ~ Steven R. DiSalvo, Ph.D., president of Saint Anselm College*

## Sisters Welcome Students for Tours...and Treats!



# Happenings

## March



St. Patrick's Day Fish Fry

Irish dancing!



Kevin Becker, Sister Madonna, cook Gary Steiger, and Sister Rosanne prepared a fish fry feast on St. Patrick's Day for the sisters. A lively evening ensued, with Irish dancing, trivia and prizes. Special thanks to the staff and families of the University of Mary for serving the meal and making us feel spoiled.



The servers!



Prizes! Father Daniel won a kite!

# April

*Jacie Steiger, Sisters Madonna and Hannah, Novice Maria, Colleen McGraw, Sisters Jeanette and Elizabeth carried on the tradition of dying eggs at Easter.*



# May



*It is a blessing for us to have Benedictine volunteer Marena Hoogland at Annunciation Monastery. She assists Sister Denise Ressler, archivist, in the monastery archives, volunteers at Ministry on the Margins, the communications office and the monastery switchboard.*

# CHI St. Alexis Health Founder's Day Celebration

Our sisters enjoyed visiting with the staff of CHI St. Alexis Health at the hospital's "Founder's Day" celebration. Several of them were taught by our sisters.



# Marching for Life

By Sister Idelle Badt



*Krista Ferrell, affiliate, and Sisters Idelle Badt, Nicole Kunze, Hannah Vanorny and JoAnn Krebsbach were among roughly 600 University of Mary students, faculty and administrators, in leading the 2017 March for Life. Hundreds of thousands marched in this beautiful event honoring life.*

I was blessed to have the opportunity to attend the March for Life for the second time this January. Since the University of Mary had the distinct honor of leading the march, it was an incredibly special occasion, and quite different from my experience last year. I must admit that I was a little apprehensive about attending the march this year because of the political climate of our country. I was afraid that someone in opposition to our cause might threaten or try to harm those in attendance. Instead, I was deeply moved by the peaceful demonstration; in fact, it seemed like there were fewer people lodging protests against us on the sidelines than last year.

I was filled with immense pride listening to our student, Katrina Gallic, speak in front of the vast crowd assembled before the march started. Her words were inspiring as she spoke about the sacredness of life at all stages. When she talked about the enormous number of lives that had been aborted from her generation alone, I was speechless. I started to think about all of the good those souls could have done in this world if given the chance, and it gave me pause to deeply consider what being pro-life means to me.

When I say that I am pro-life, I am saying that I care deeply about life from the womb to the tomb. I want to make sure that all children are given as much care and concern after they are born, as they get while they are still inside the womb. This means that if I am going to participate in activities that aim to end abortion, I should also participate in activities that aim to end the death penalty and assisted suicide. Life is life, whether it is an unborn child or a middle-aged person on death row.

I saw a gentleman at the March for Life carrying a sign that said, “Black Lives Matter, Unborn Lives Matter, Syrian Lives Matter, Workers’ Lives Matter, Earth’s Life Matters, Family Lives Matter,” and I thought to myself—right on! That is being pro-life. I was quite happy, when about halfway through the march, he joined us at the front and proudly held that sign. At that moment I felt like I was truly part of the pro-life movement.

# In Loving Memory



**Sister Miriam Schmitt, OSB**

**Born: March 24, 1925**

**Professed: July 1, 1948**

**Died: May 12, 2017**

## **Sister Miriam Schmitt, OSB**

Sister Miriam Schmitt, a Benedictine sister for 68 years, was a scholar, an elementary, secondary and college educator, and a financial administrator. She had a brilliant mind and did extensive research on medieval women monastics, mystics, spirituality and liturgy. She shared her research throughout the United States through lectures, spiritual direction, retreats and at ecumenical spiritual formation academies.

Author of articles for Benedictine publications, she co-edited the book “Medieval Women Monastics: Wisdom’s Wellsprings.” She had a special place in her heart for mystics Hildegard of Bingen and Gertrude the Great. Sister Miriam had a deep spirituality, a great love of Jesus and treasured the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist. She will be missed for her gentle presence, delightful sense of humor and a precious smile that brightened the hearts of many. We pray that Sister Miriam is rejoicing in the love and peace of God’s presence.



**Sister Helen Kilzer, OSB**

**Born: January 11, 1918**

**Professed: July 11, 1940**

**Died: June 3, 2017**

## **Sister Helen Kilzer, OSB**

Sister Helen Kilzer, a Benedictine sister for 77 years, was well known for her passion for teaching. She taught junior high students for 20 years and then taught French for eight years at St. Mary’s Central High and French, German and Spanish for over 20 years at the University of Mary. Sister Helen believed the best way to learn a language was to speak it. She took groups of students abroad to immerse them in the language and culture of the people. “I wanted my students to learn to respect and appreciate the differences in others,” she said.

For her dedication to teaching world languages and cultures, she was honored with the Sister Helen Kilzer Lifetime Service Award from the Foreign Language Association of North Dakota.

Sister Helen had an enthusiastic love of life and learning. With a heart for God, monastic life, languages and people, she enriched the lives of many. May she live forever in God’s tender love.

---

# Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity

---

By Candace Simar

**Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.**  
**Revelations 3:20**

Come in, Dear Jesus. I open the door. I've been lonesome, but didn't know it was for you. Thank you for knocking. Thank you for seeking me. Make me new. Wash away my sins. I repent of the mess I've made of my life. Change old habits of thinking, mistakes and patterns of selfishness. Come to me, Lord Jesus. I welcome you.

Come in. I receive you, Jesus in your Body and Blood. I taste you. I swallow you. I incorporate you into every cell of my being. Sweet Holy Spirit, my body absorbs you. The dead, empty spaces are filled with your light. My desiccated cells absorb your living water. The life of your presence restores life in me. Change me. I receive you.

Fill me with your love. I receive it. I permit you to flush away hatred and bitterness, I allow you to heal the broken parts of my life. You offer yourself freely, and I take you in. Your love is sweet on my lips, life-giving on my tongue. Dear Lord, I receive you.

Send courage, Lord, that stoutness of heart and focus that comes only from you. In me I find weakness and cowardice, fear of the future, and dread of what might happen. I ask for your courage, and receive it into my life. I choose to follow you,

and allow you to fight my battles. I hide within your wounds and take courage in your strength. I receive your courage, Dear Lord. I take you in.

Bless me with faith to move mountains, and to remove the mountain of doubt within me. I ask for the grain of faith no bigger than a mustard seed. Plant it within me and let it grow into a mighty tree that withstands every test. Give me strength to provide shelter and shade for others. I receive this gift of faith. I allow you to plant it within my heart.

I need hope. Father, send your gift of hope to my spirit. In the face of troubles and circumstances, the hope within me has withered. The light in my heart has grown dim. Stoke the flame and let hope rise up in my being. Give me hope to believe your promises. Grant me the hope and faith needed to receive from your hand.

Although I am unworthy, I receive you into my life. I lay all that I am at your feet and ask you to recycle it into something better. Come in. Come in. I'm so glad to receive you. Thank you for knocking. Thank you for coming to me.

My child, as I come into your life, I do not come empty handed. I carry the gifts and fruits of my spirit. I long to bless you, and long to fill you with all things good. I dreamed a wonderful dream for your life. Dream with me as we journey together. Jesus.



Candace Simar is an award-winning Minnesota poet and writer who regularly visits Annunciation Monastery to write. She finds the peaceful, prayerful environment nurturing for her creativity. She can occasionally be found doing dishes in the monastery kitchen with her husband, Keith. Keith also refurbishes monastery bird houses when they are in need of repair! They are both oblates of Annunciation Monastery.

Candace authored the Spur Award-winning ABERCROMBIE TRAIL SERIES (Abercrombie Trail; Pomme de Terre; Birdie and Blooming Prairie) and Shelterbelts. To learn more about her work, check out her website at [www.candacesimar.com](http://www.candacesimar.com)

**Annunciation Monastery**  
7520 University Drive  
Bismarck, ND 58504-9634

[www.annunciationmonastery.org](http://www.annunciationmonastery.org)

**ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED**

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.

NONPROFIT ORG  
US POSTAGE  
PAID  
UNITED PRINTING



Like us on Facebook:  
Annunciation Monastery



Follow us on Twitter:  
@Annunciationmon

If you are interested in making a donation in support of our ministries, please use the enclosed envelope. Thank you. Please remember us when making or revising your will. Our legal name is: Benedictine Sisters of the Annunciation, B.M.V. For more information, contact Jill Ackerman, director of communications and development, (701)355-8907 or: [jill@annunciationmonastery.org](mailto:jill@annunciationmonastery.org)

## A Joyful Spirit Retreat for *Girls* Ages 8-14

Friday, July 28, 2017 | 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
Annunciation Monastery



Join us for a free, fun-filled day of activities with our sisters! Meet new friends, play games, win prizes, make crafts, pray with the sisters and enjoy laughs and snacks (including the ever-popular s'mores on the patio!)

For more information or to register, contact Sister Hannah at (701)425-9734 or email: [hvanorny@gmail.com](mailto:hvanorny@gmail.com)  
There is no charge, but pre-registration is required.