



# Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

FALL/WINTER 2012

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



*With arms uplifted, Sister Madelyn sings the suscipe "Receive me, O Lord..." at her perpetual monastic profession.*

*"Receive me, O Lord, according to your promise and I shall live.  
Do not disappoint me in my hope."*

This humble plea from the Psalms is a powerful example of giving oneself to God, completely. These words were chanted by Sister Madelyn Louttit (with Prioress, Sister Nancy Miller) when she made her perpetual monastic profession on June 9, 2012.

A native of Brooklyn, New York, Sister Madelyn was raised Jewish. Interestingly, she always had a deep interest in Catholicism. "Something just drew me; it seemed so holy and almost transcendent," she explains. When her husband of 15 years, Emmet Louttit, invited her to join the Catholic faith, she was eager to learn more and eventually converted. Following Emmet's death in 1998, Sister Madelyn immersed herself in parish work -- choir, youth ministry, food pantry, liturgy committee and the RCIA program.

Sister Madelyn Louttit's story continues on page 3



MESSAGE FROM THE

# Prioress

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council which brought dramatic renewal to the Catholic Church. Since I grew up in the post-Vatican II Church, I am grateful to my Benedictine sisters who shared what it was like to live in the Church shortly after Vatican II.

They say that the reforms in the liturgy, the way in which the Church understood itself and the call to embrace the needs of the world affected all Catholics. The concept of the equality of all the baptized opened the doors for more lay participation in the liturgy and in the whole life of the Catholic Church.

Sister Kathryn Zimmer, prioress for 10 years after the council, emphasized education, dialogue, inner renewal and reaching out to people in new ways as some means of incorporating the teachings of Vatican II. Every sister in the community received a copy of the Documents of Vatican II which was diligently studied. Sisters pursued further study in liturgy, Scripture, theology, and religious education.

Our community became involved in assisting pastors in implementing the reforms and in educating their people about the teachings of Vatican II. The change from Latin to the vernacular (the language of the people) as well as revisions in the celebration of the liturgy took preparation and practice.

Our sisters say that our common prayer and the Eucharist are more meaningful now that they can understand and reflect on the meaning of the

words. Also the council's emphasis on reading the Scriptures has helped us grow deeper in the Lord Jesus.

The call to return to the vision of our founder, St. Benedict, and his Rule also made a great impact on our community. New English translations and resources on the Rule of Benedict facilitate our ongoing study. We are living monastic life more deeply and articulating more clearly St. Benedict's emphasis on seeking God above all else and living the Gospel. We are also more intentional about inviting all who work with us in our sponsored ministries to live those same values.

Pope Benedict has declared October 11, 2012 – November 24, 2013 as the Year of Faith. October 11th marks the 50th anniversary of the opening of Vatican II and November 24th the Feast of Christ the King. This is a unique opportunity for our community and all the faithful to renew our baptismal call and deepen our knowledge of the faith. There are several activities in our diocese and other dioceses around the world for us to participate during The Year of Faith. May God bless you, and all of us, as we continue to grow in the love of the Lord Jesus.

Blessings to all!

Sister Nancy Miller, OSB

She received her Master of Arts in Theology from the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception, Huntington, N.Y., and a Master of Science in Psychology from the Graduate Faculty, New School for Social Research, Manhattan. She is also a certified spiritual director.

Sister Madelyn yearned to live a life more committed to God and made several visits to Annunciation Monastery to explore religious life. She says, "Here I was with a bunch of sisters in North Dakota and I had never felt more at peace in my entire life!"

One would think a New Yorker might feel like a fish out of water at a monastery in Bismarck, North Dakota, but Sister Madelyn quickly adapted to the prayer life, charism and mission of the sisters and to life on the North Dakota prairie.

*"Here I was with a bunch of sisters in North Dakota and I had never felt more at peace in my entire life!"*

"When we celebrate a sister's perpetual monastic profession, there is a wonderful sense of community and hope for the future," says Sister Nancy Miller, prioress. "We commit ourselves to the three-fold promise of stability, fidelity to the monastic way of life and obedience. Stability means being deeply rooted in

this Benedictine, monastic community, in this place – Bismarck, North Dakota, in service to the people of this region. In faithfulness to the monastic way of life, we seek God daily and continue in formation according to the Rule of St. Benedict and the tradition of Annunciation Monastery, with a spirit of obedience."

Sister Madelyn feels deep appreciation and gratitude for her monastic community. "I am constantly reminded of the many ways God has walked with me throughout my life. I believe God's hand brought me to this place and opened my eyes to experience God's presence in these sisters, their mission and in nature. The sisters truly love and care about one another. Respect and hospitality are fostered, and, most of all, prayer and dependence on God are the mainstay of our way of life. I look forward to the future, walking with these women, sharing a way of life rooted in God and serving others in the Benedictine tradition of faith, courage, dedication and grace."

*Sister Madelyn Louttit is director of Student Accessibility Services at the University of Mary. In this ministry, she coordinates accommodations for students who have special needs. She teaches courses on Native American history and Native American religion and is taking lessons in piano and quilting.*



## Field Trip to the Monastery

St. Mary's Grade School students proudly show the Benedictine medals they received from Sister Patricia Schap who took them on a tour of the monastery. They spent time in chapel and joined the sisters for rice krispie bars and lemonade. Sister Patricia Schap, back row (center) has volunteered at the school for three years.

# Monastery Hosts Sisters of the Federation of St. Benedict

The excitement mounted as Benedictine Sisters from around the world came together at Annunciation Monastery in mid July. The occasion was the tri-annual meeting of the Federation of St. Benedict, a congregation of ten member monasteries from the United States, Puerto Rico, Bahamas, Japan and Taiwan.

“It is a privilege for our monastic community to host this meeting of Benedictine sisters from around the world,” said Sister Nancy Miller, prioress of Annunciation Monastery, in her welcome during the opening ritual on July 17. “We value the opportunity to come together and draw from the wisdom and



*The meetings consisted of presentations, sharing, singing in various languages, recreation and planning for the future.*



*Photo by: Jerry Anderson*

*Sisters from the Federation of St. Benedict gathered at Annunciation Monastery for a chapter meeting in July.*

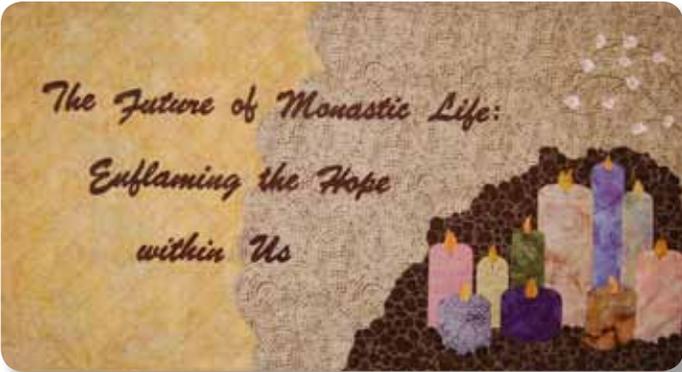
culturally rich perspectives that better prepare us to serve the world today and into the future.”

Federation of St. Benedict president, Sister Susan Hutchens of St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island, Illinois, said the meeting is to conduct the business of the Federation and provide the opportunity for sisters to work and share together on topics of interest such as bringing forth hope in life and in the Church, and the culture of vocation and formation in monastic communities today.

Energized by one another and the theme “Enflaming the Hope Within Us,” the 40 Benedictine sisters shared with one another, listened intently to presentations and even found some time to explore places like Fort Lincoln, the beautiful Badlands/ Medora, and local musicals and attractions.



*Sister Denise Ressler registers sisters for the meeting.*



*This quilt was made by Sisters Nancy Gunderson and Rosemary DeGracia especially for the Federation of St. Benedict meeting.*



*Each prioress carried forth a candle representing their Benedictine community in the opening prayer ceremony, fitting the theme “Enflaming the Hope Within Us.”*



*Meet the council of the Federation of St. Benedict Elected by the chapter members: Sister Linda Soler (St. Paul's Monastery, St. Paul, MN), Sister Edith Bogue (St. Scholastica Monastery, Duluth, MN), Sister Susan Hutchens (St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island, IL), Sister Agatha Muggli (Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, ND), Sister Mary Jane Berger (St. Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, MN). Sister Agatha Muggli was named vice president at the chapter meeting.*

## Welcome American Benedictine Formation Conference Core Team

A dedicated group of sisters who form the core team of the American Benedictine Formation Conference (ABFC) met at Annunciation Monastery in September. This national organization oversees programs regarding the holy work of vocation ministry, programs for novices and directors and for sisters discerning perpetual profession, and offers a bi-annual national symposium.



*From left to right: Sisters Rose Wildeman (Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, IN), Gabrielle Marie Oestreich (Immaculata Monastery, Norfolk, NE), Agatha Muggli, chair of ABFC core team, (Annunciation Monastery), Kimberly Prohaska (St. Scholastica Monastery, Fort Smith, AR), Jennifer Mechtild Horner (Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, IN).*

## Congratulations Sister Barbara Weber and Sister Janet Zander on the 50th Anniversary of your Monastic Profession!



*Photo by: Jerry Anderson*

*Sister Barbara Weber and Sister Janet Zander renew their monastic profession and commitment to continue in their journey to God as monastic, Benedictine women. Sisters, friends and family gathered to celebrate their 50th Jubilee on June 30.*

# Sewn with Love and Prayer

A gift of love, prayer and welcome was presented to the Most Reverend Bishop David Kagan, Bishop of Bismarck, by the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. The Bishop's coat of arms was transformed into an embroidered masterpiece that reflects the heritage of the Diocese of Bismarck, as well as the heritage and identity of the Bishop.

Commissioned by Joyce McDowall of the diocese, Sisters Nancy Gunderson and Rosemary DeGracia spent more than 200 hours over the course of four months meticulously replicating the drawing of the coat of arms using fabric and ornate embroidery.

*"It was literally stitched with the love and prayers of the sisters."*

The design is similar to Bishop Paul Zipfel's coat of arms, with the left side bearing the diocesan symbols and a design unique to each bishop on the right. "The coat of arms is displayed above the bishop's chair; some are painted, but this one is fabric like a wall-hanging," explains Sister Rosemary. "It was a process of trial and error. I made several prototypes



*The Most Reverend Bishop David Kagan was presented his hand-sewn coat of arms by Sister Nancy Miller, prioress, after evening prayer and dinner with the sisters. Lt. to rt.: Sister Rosemary DeGracia, Sister Nancy Miller, prioress, Bishop David Kagan and Sister Nancy Gunderson.*

and consulted with a vendor to find a stitch to best replicate the stitching and style. We contacted a vendor to digitize the text for the embroidered Latin motto, 'Nihil Amori Christi Praeponere,' in English, 'Prefer Nothing to the love of Christ.' This is also the Benedictine motto."

Sister Nancy says, "The sisters would frequently stop by to see how we were doing; we really felt their prayerful support as we worked. It was literally stitched with the love and prayers of the sisters."

Both sisters agreed, the creation of the coat of arms was more difficult than they ever imagined. They say they approached it differently than their own personal art, admitting "We reverently made it up as we went along!"

The making of the coat of arms was blessed, according to the sisters. "We did our best to make it personal and respect Bishop Kagan's identity. It wasn't something that could be rushed. It was a pilgrimage of sorts, done in God's time."



## Seminarians Join Sisters at Prayer and Table

Our sisters enjoyed getting to know the seminarians of the Bismarck Diocese when they joined us for prayer and lunch. Please join us in prayer for our seminarians and women in religious formation.

## A Joyful Spirit: Girls, God and Fun!



*The girls made a doll to represent a holy woman from the Bible who inspires them.*

One of our facebook friends may have summarized the “Girls, God and Fun” camp best. She posted, “Looks like a bunch of dear girls doing wholesome activities while strengthening their faith!” The day included meeting new friends, visiting with the sisters, prayer, pizza, games, crafts and s’mores on the patio. We can’t wait until next year!

## Join Us For Annunciation Monastery Hospitality Center Fall/Winter Spiritual Enrichment Programs:

To help deepen your relationship with God and bring you peace, let the peaceful, prayerful environment of our home soothe your soul and refresh your spirit. For a complete listing and program descriptions, please see our website “Events”: [www.annunciationmonastery.org](http://www.annunciationmonastery.org) or call Sister Gemma Peters at 701-255-1520

- T’ai Chi Chih® Joy Through Movement
- Ongoing Practice of T’ai Chi Chih® Joy Through Movement
- Spiritual Direction
- Centering Prayer Follow-Up Sessions (must have had Intro to Centering Prayer)
- Private and Group Retreats
- Outreach Programs

# Sponsorship Goes On the Road

What a blessing it was for our sisters to spend the day with staff at Garrison Memorial Hospital, Garrison, and Community Memorial Hospital, Turtle Lake. The sisters were welcomed with true Benedictine hospitality. Sisters presented educational sessions on sponsorship and mission in health care. Gratitude and prayers to all who carry the mission forward and, "let all be received as Christ."



*Sister JoAnn invites sharing with the staff of Garrison Memorial Hospital.*



*Sisters Nancy Miller, Thomas Welder, Gerard Wald, Denise Ressler, Janet Zander, JoAnn Krebsbach and Nancy Gunderson saw mission in action at Community Memorial Hospital, Turtle Lake, ND.*



*Sister Gerard Wald leads a discussion with staff at Community Memorial Hospital.*

# Sponsorship Formation Day Offers New Insights



*Dr. Michael Naughton facilitated our third annual sponsorship formation day on May 3 for leaders from our sponsored ministries, St. Alexius Medical Center, Garrison Memorial Hospital, Community Memorial Hospital (Turtle Lake) and the University of Mary.*



*We sisters appreciated insights offered by Dr. Michael Naughton (front, center) during our day of collaboration with our sponsored ministries.*



*Deb Kenner and Sister Agnes Reinert stand by the Kenner Law Enforcement Memorial wall. Deb works at the Bismarck Police Department, where she first met Steven.*

## "Lord, help me be your comfort, your presence..."

The unthinkable happened the evening of July 8, 2011. After enjoying supper with his family, Sergeant Steven Kenner returned to his shift at the Bismarck Police Department. He responded to a domestic disturbance and was tragically killed in the line of duty, protecting others. A beloved husband, father and friend to many; Kenner was the first fallen officer in the Bismarck Police force. His death was felt by the Bismarck community and beyond.

As the volunteer chaplain for the team of officers that included Sergeant Kenner, Sister Agnes Reinert was called. She was taken directly to the hospital where Kenner's family was gathered. "There is no way to prepare for a situation like this. You don't

have time to "plan" what to say or do, you just go and be present," explains Sister Agnes. "I know God is already there with the family, so when I get a call, I pray on the way by asking, 'Lord, help me be your comfort, your presence – use me if you can.' It is even more difficult when you know the people involved. I knew Sergeant Kenner. He was a very friendly, dedicated person who loved his family and his work in law enforcement. He was a good man."

Sister Agnes recalls police officers going in and out of the hospital room that night, surrounding the family with loving support. The wife of one of the officers stands out in her memory as a comfort for Kenner's wife, Deb.

Sister Agnes says her ministry calls her to be present to those involved, whether that person is a family member, friend or a fellow police officer. "Words aren't always necessary, sometimes all we can do is to listen or support them by being there. More important than words are the prayers and acts of kindness that follow in the weeks, months and even years ahead."

A special remembrance ceremony was held July 8, 2012, to honor Sergeant Kenner. Sister Agnes was invited to present the Prayer of Dedication. This is the prayer she offered:

*'Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.'*

*"Gracious and Loving God,  
We have gathered here to honor a fallen hero, Sergeant Steven Kenner. He wore the badge with honor, and revealed his love for our community by laying down his life. This wall and plaque serve to remind each of us of what our Lord said - 'Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.' Each of us, in our own way, as family members, fellow officers, and friends, will remember him, but long after we are gone, this wall will remain as a remembrance of his dedicated service. May you grant to those who will continue to serve in his stead, protection from those who would do them harm. Watch over them as they serve and protect our community. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen."*



*Sister Agnes &  
Sergeant Steven Kenner*

*This snapshot of Sister Agnes with Sergeant Steven Kenner hangs on the wall by Deb Kenner's desk. She says, "This is one of my favorite pictures. I don't know what we'd do at the department without Sister Agnes."*

# "Benedict Sure Was Right!"

*A Letter from Sister Hannah Vanorny – from the Benedictine Spirituality Workshop and Retreat (BSWR)*



into our respective communities. There were ten participants from ten different communities. We attended classes on a wide range of topics such as Lectio (silent reflection on scripture), social justice and the Rule of St. Benedict, the Liturgy of the Hours, Hospitality and Discernment and many more. We had meaningful discussions and shared powerful prayer experiences together. We squeezed in a few fun activities including the Canal Walk in downtown Indianapolis and experienced fried pickles at a famous diner. We ended our time together with a week-long directed silent retreat.

I LOVED spending time with other Benedictine sisters who are in the same stage of formation as I am. As we studied, visited and had fun together, we formed tight bonds which we will carry into the future. BSWR helped me realize that our monastic values unite us all as Benedictines. They are alive and strong within each community and within every sister. Our values of hospitality, prayer (personal and communal), obedience built on listening and respect, stability of both heart and place, and community will sustain us as we continue to commit ourselves to our shared seeking of God.

This trip helped confirm my Benedictine monastic vocation. As I interacted with, prayed with, and had fun with other BSWR participants, I realized again how much I love the Benedictine charism. There is so much hope, joy and deep spirituality in the Benedictine world, and I am grateful to God that I am called to be part of it!

I had the most amazing time at BSWR this past summer! The Benedictine Spirituality Workshop and Retreat, or “Benedict Sure Was Right,” a new phrase coined by the prioress at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, is a three-week experience for Benedictine sisters in the United States who are a step closer to making their perpetual monastic profession. This might be more easily understood as “final vows,” even though we don’t call them that anymore.

This year’s conference was at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Ind. Our goal in attending BSWR is to get ready to enter permanently



*Sisters Melissa Cote and Gerard Wald (middle) invite University of Mary students to join them for the three 'Cs' – chips, chocolate and conversation!*



## At Home in St. Scholastica!

The University of Mary has renovated two floors of one of the residence halls to be intentional faith-based communities, St. Joseph's Hall for men and St. Scholastica Hall for women. Sister Melissa and Sister Gerard reside in St. Scholastica Hall where they gather with students to pray, talk, play games, watch movies and laugh together. Sister Gerard says, "We want this to be a place of hospitality where students feel welcomed and supported in their faith and as they discern their path in life."

## DeGracia Earns MBA



*Sister Rosemary DeGracia*

Congratulations to Sister Rosemary DeGracia who earned her Masters of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Mary. She credits "the gifts God has given me and the generous support of my monastic community, family and

friends. I don't think learning is ever over. Its value appears in 'connect-the-dots' moments like sitting at a conference and hearing the speaker reference a theory I just studied. Knowing that coursework has real-life, immediate application is very rewarding!" DeGracia currently serves as Academic Affairs Associate at the University of Mary.

## Sister Barbara Receives Service Award

Sister Barbara Weber was awarded a 35-year service award at the St. Alexius Medical Center employee awards banquet in October. She continues her ministry at St. Alexius as a pastoral assistant in telemetry and intensive care where she offers a prayerful presence to patients, families and staff. Congratulations, Sister Barbara!



*Sister Barbara Weber*

# Walking Holy Ground in China

by Kathleen Atkinson, osb

*"Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy."*

I have loved this quote since I first saw it on a prayer card for foreign missions. I continue to learn the depth and tenderness of its meaning as I journey to mission areas here at home and around the world. This past May, I experienced it in travel to China as part of the 13th annual Benedictine China Study Tour sponsored by the Benedictine Commission for China.

I accepted the invitation to be part of this experience for several reasons. The people of China make up almost 1/4 of the world's population; they are rapidly transforming themselves from serene rice farmers to hurried factory workers to global technological leaders. I wanted to know what it felt like to be in the midst of them. China's five thousand year history includes the amazing Great Wall and Terra Cotta Warriors; its cities boast cutting-edge contemporary architecture. I wanted to become immersed in this ancient-modern world. I have connections to China - the first Benedictine women who went to China in 1930 were from Saint Benedict's in Minnesota, our own founding monastery. It's the connections, immense differences and common humanity that made this trip inspiring, challenging, and indeed, holy.

Our group of five engaged in dialogue with communities of Chinese women religious in Xi'an, Shanghai, Beijing and Shijiazhuang as well as with students at seminaries in Beijing and Hebei. The sisters are involved primarily in social ministries: work with lepers and AIDS patients, orphanages, homes for the elderly, parish work, catechesis and religious art. They are young communities, founded since the mid 1980s. They are clarifying their own



*Sister Kathleen stopped to visit this traditional Chinese elder on the path to the birthplace of Confucius.*

charisms and role in the emerging Chinese Catholic Church. We offered presentations on formation, ministry, and leadership in various locations as well as a seminar on inter-religious dialogue at Xi'an Northwest University. I loved the creative challenge of teaching leadership practices via an interpreter; much laughter helped to bridge any and all language encumbrances!

China was indeed holy ground for me -- walking in a land steeped in history; learning to be vulnerable and trust an interpreter to teach, a guide to navigate, even unfamiliar food and unfamiliar ways of eating that food (chopsticks!). I'm deeply grateful for the opportunity and ask all people to pray for the Church in China and especially for the brave women religious who serve there.

# Breaking Ground

Continuing Rich Heritage of Healing in Mandan

The healing mission of St. Alexius Medical Center continues to grow in Mandan, N.D. The sisters shared in the blessing and groundbreaking for the St. Alexius Mandan Clinic on September 6.



(Lt. to rt.) Arlyn Van Beek, mayor of Mandan; Gary P. Miller, president/CEO of St. Alexius Medical Center; Sister Nancy Miller, prioress of Annunciation Monastery, John Castleberry, chair of the St. Alexius Medical Center Board of Directors, and Kelvin Hullet, president of the Bismarck-Mandan Chamber of Commerce.



*Sister Thomas Welder, Frank Kilzer, and Sisters Lawrence Fischer, Agatha Muggli, Nicole Kunze, Helen Kilzer, JoAnn Krebsbach, Susan Lardy, Renee Zastoupil, Hannah Vanorny lent their support and prayers.*



**Sister James Messer**

**Born:** May 6, 1928  
**Professed:** July 11, 1951  
**Died:** September 29, 2012

## In Loving Memory

### Sister James Messer, OSB

Sister James had a passion for teaching. Throughout most of her life, she taught many people, young and old, about a variety of subjects, but especially about the love of God for them.

She taught in Mandan, Mott, Dickinson, and was principal of Cathedral Grade School, Bismarck. She was religious education coordinator in Richardton and Bismarck, pastoral minister in Bowman and Dickinson and pastoral care minister at St. Benedict's Health Center, Dickinson.

Sister James understood suffering and brought compassion, understanding and a listening heart to those whose lives she touched in her 61 years as a Benedictine sister. She had a deep faith in Jesus, especially in the Eucharist and sought to live her life as a witness to the love of Christ, encouraging others to do the same.

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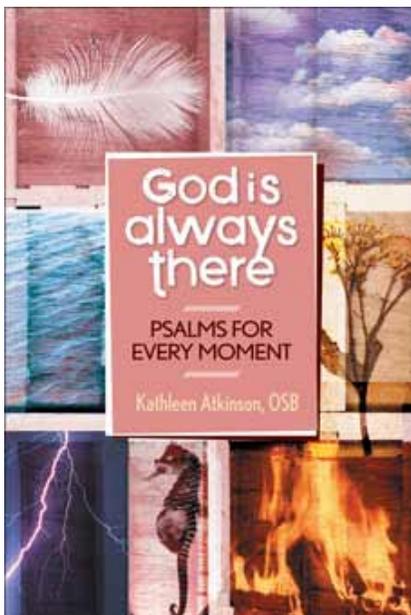
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