



SPRING 2026

Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

Sister Nicole Kunze Re-elected as Prioress

On March 14, 2026, following a time of prayerful discernment, Sister Nicole Kunze, OSB, was re-elected as prioress of Annunciation Monastery. First called to this role in 2016, Sister Nicole faithfully led the community through consecutive four and six-year terms. Now, guided by the Holy Spirit and with the support of her sisters, she has graciously accepted the call to serve another six-year term.

Her re-election was marked with a formal re-installation on March 14, in the presence of the monastic community and election facilitators Sister Kimberly Porter of St. Walburg Monastery in Covington, Kentucky, and Sister Nancy Bauer of Saint Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota, who also serves as president of the Monastic Congregation of Saint Benedict.



Sister Nicole Kunze said, "Yes," to serving her monastic community and God's people in her role as prioress.

"I am deeply humbled by the trust my monastic community has placed in me to serve another six years," Sister Nicole shared. "I am grateful for the relationships I share with each sister and for the support they offer so generously. Their wisdom, holiness, and

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MESSAGE FROM THE

Prioress

As you saw in the cover story for this issue, my Sisters have re-elected me as prioress for a third term. My new term began immediately so there wasn't any anticipation for a formal day of ending or beginning. I just kept doing what I've been doing. The event of re-election has caused me to pause this spring and reflect on ten years of leadership within our monastic community. I was assisted in this reflection by an appreciation dinner and program, hosted by my sisters in May, in gratitude for my past service and my "yes" in accepting another term.

When I reflect on the past ten years, I make two lists – what has changed and what has remained the same. Regarding the changes, there have been many:

- New members joining us and others leaving the community
- Deaths of Sisters
- Arrival and departure of employees
- The incorporation of Ministry on the Margins as a sponsored ministry
- Building projects at the University of Mary
- The 140th anniversary celebration of St. Alexius in 2025
- The 75th anniversary celebration of Annunciation Monastery in 2022
- Implementation of an oblate formation program and receiving several new oblates

We know change is inevitable. We don't want to stay the same, yet in Benedictine life, there are several anchors that hold us steady and I appreciate the fact that these parts of my life don't change:

- Our daily schedule of community prayer and Mass
- Our shared meals and conversation with each other at three meals every day
- Our community's commitment to serve the people of this area through our sponsored ministries and our prayer ministry
- Each Sister continues to seek God through our common life together every day

In my remarks to the Sisters at the appreciation dinner, I shared my gratitude for them and their support of my leadership. It is my honor and privilege to be their prioress. I also found it necessary to ask my Sisters for their forgiveness. I have failed them many times and I am grateful for God's mercy – and theirs. This monastic community has given me so much over the thirty years I've been a member. I have them to credit for who I am today. Everything I do as prioress is because of my love for this community and my desire for their well-being. I look forward to all of us working together to faithfully live our Benedictine life and serve God's people for years to come.

Sister Nicole Kunze

lived experience continues to shape and deepen my own faith. I have grown in my understanding of our monastic life, the richness of the Benedictine charism both here and around the world, and the impact of our ministries. I cherish the love and prayer that surround me each day.”



Sister Nicole Kunze with parents, Allen and Marilyn, at her 25th Jubilee. (June 19, 2021)

A native of the Valley City area and the eldest child

of Allen and Marilyn Kunze, Sister Nicole first encountered the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery while studying at the University of Mary, where she earned her undergraduate degree in biology. She later earned a Ph.D. in chemical education from the University of Northern Colorado, where she was honored with the Graduate Dean’s Citation for Outstanding Dissertation. Since entering the monastery in 1996, Sister Nicole has devoted herself to both education and community life, including five years teaching chemistry and biology at St. Mary’s Central High School. She then offered ten years of dedicated service as an associate professor of chemistry at the University of Mary—where she received the Regents’ Award for Teaching Faculty in 2011. She was also recognized with an honorary doctoral degree from Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, in 2025.

Within the monastery, Sister Nicole offers leadership to the sisters’ sponsored ministries, including CHI St. Alexius Health, the University of Mary, and Ministry on the Margins. Her service extends beyond the local community as well, including leadership roles within the Monastic Congregation of St. Benedict and the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses.

As prioress, Sister Nicole serves as both spiritual and administrative leader, guiding the monastic community as they move forward with their mission and vision for the future. “I am excited about the directions our community has chosen for the future,” she said.

Reflecting on the mission of the community, Sister Nicole shared, “The spirit of our founding sisters continues to guide us today. Those courageous sisters came to Dakota Territory in 1878 with faith and hope to serve the needs of the people. With that same faith and hope, we strive to enrich the lives of others through prayer and service. It is my hope that our monastery will continue to be a place that offers radical hospitality to all who come here. We invite women who may be discerning religious life, to come and get to know our sisters and our charism.”



Photo by: Rebecca Raber

"I recently retired, which has given me time to reflect on what music I would like to write as well as a bit of extra time to actually write it. My first big project has been the Annunciation Psalms and Antiphons, which is dedicated to the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. The Sisters of Annunciation Monastery were my first teachers and my first piano teachers. They have continued to influence my life and my spirituality, especially as a student at the University of Mary, one of their sponsored institutions, and in my work with the Diocese of Bismarck and at the University of Mary. I am forever grateful for their witness of faith and prayer as well as their friendship."

~ Dr. Thomas Porter

Dr. Thomas Porter Dedicates Annunciation Psalms and Chants to the Sisters

The Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery were honored with a surprise that will fill the monastery chapel with heavenly music for years to come, the Annunciation Psalms and Chants, written by Dr. Thomas Porter. A University of Mary graduate, Porter became a renowned composer, conductor, and lifelong advocate for the arts. His music bridges the sacred and the everyday. For more than fifty years, he's written works that have found their way into classrooms, cathedrals, and concert halls around the world.

Dr. Porter recently visited with his first piano teacher, Sister Agatha Muggli, who recalls Tom playing a Bach prelude as a child. Tom remembers preparing for piano festivals. He says, "It was a big event. We were required to prepare several pieces, and they had to be memorized. When I had Sister Cecile, she made me play the scale and chords in the key of the music pieces before I was even allowed to play the piece. It was a wonderful way to become very proficient in piano and I was leagues ahead of the other students, which I credit to that kind of training!"



Some of the sisters gathered to visit with Dr. Porter about his beautiful gift honoring the sisters. Lt. to rt.: Sisters Nicole Kunze, Susan Lardy, Eleanor Stockert, Tom Porter's mother, Pat Porter; Sister Denise Ressler, Tom Porter, Sisters Nancy Gunderson, Renee Zastoupil, Janet Zander, and Agatha Muggli.

Dr. Porter has been conducting the Bismarck-Mandan Civic Chorus for over 33 years, served as professor of music for 16 years at the University of Mary, and is now an adjunct professor for the Master of Arts in Music program at the University of Mary.

As a composer, Dr. Porter explains, "People are looking more into singing the psalms and antiphons at church. I tried to create settings that tied together melodies and psalm tones for a season, beautiful music that was usable for the church and easy for the congregation to sing." Sister Agatha added, "It's very Benedictine to be conscious and encourage active participation in the liturgy. We try to take note of the capacity of the assembly. Tom's music has achieved this."

For more information, Dr. Porter's website is:
www.tomportermusic.net



Dr. Thomas Porter with his first piano teacher, Sr. Agatha Muggli, holding the composition dedicated to the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. Prior to publication, the settings were approved for liturgical use by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the International Commission on English in the Liturgy, and additional pieces approved for liturgical use by The Most Reverend David Kagan, Bishop of Bismarck.

Sisters Among Those Honored for Service at the N.D. Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

Sisters Raphaela Cady and Rosemary DeGracia were among those honored at the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's Volunteer Appreciation Dinner.

Both sisters received challenge coins in recognition of their exemplary volunteer service. Their compassionate ministry and steadfast dedication continue to bring dignity and hope to others and enrich the faith lives of those involved in the oblate program.

Congratulations to all of the volunteers who faithfully serve at the North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.



Sisters Raphaela Cady and Rosemary DeGracia hold their challenge coins.



Sister Raphaela offers the oblate program at the penitentiary Monday evenings. In December, four of the men made their oblation. As oblate director, Sister Rosemary assists in their formation program. When individuals make their oblation, Sister Rosemary and Prioress Sister Nicole Kunze attend and receive the men as oblates and sign their oblation documents.

Stepping Stone Medical Respite Learning, Teamwork, and Hope

By Sister Idelle Badt

Stepping Stone Ministries has now been open to residents for a little over seven months. This milestone has been a joyful opportunity for our staff to pause, reflect, and celebrate all that we have learned and all that has been accomplished in such a short but deeply meaningful time.

From the very beginning, we have been intentional about building a culture of reflection and growth. Whenever a resident is discharged, we come together as a team. We ask: What went well? What can we learn? How can we grow? These conversations strengthen us and reaffirm something we hold at our core: we are truly a team. And when we work together, even the most challenging situations become opportunities for grace, growth, and shared strength.

We have been richly blessed with an exceptional staff of individuals who care deeply about the people we serve and about one another. One phrase I often use is that we are all “broom pushers.” If something needs to be done, we simply do it. We step in for one another without hesitation. This spirit of shared responsibility creates a culture of humility, mutual respect, and joyful service that is at the heart of everything we do.

We are also incredibly grateful for our social work and communications interns, who bring energy, compassion, and fresh perspective to our community. We celebrate their contributions and look forward with hope as they carry this experience into their future vocations.

Another tremendous gift to our residents has been our partnership with the University of Mary. Each week, students and faculty from the Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy programs come to Stepping Stone to work directly with our residents. Without this partnership, many of those we serve would not have access to these essential services. Beyond clinical care, these encounters foster dignity, human connection, and healing in profound ways.



Amelia Gold and Sister Idelle Badt assist a resident.

STEPPING STONE MINISTRIES

This partnership is just as transformative for the students. One physical therapy student recently shared:

“Stepping Stone is always an absolutely fantastic experience, and I can never say enough about how this contributes to my development as a future physical therapist. I learn more in five minutes at Stepping Stone than any class could teach me. It only further fuels the fire of wanting to be service-oriented in my future practice. It shows me that there is a population that is so lonely, and would do anything to just have human experiences, and just have anyone show that they care for them. Stepping Stone also helps give me the ultimate humility in that life, and physical therapy care, is never about me, but how I can use my gifts to pour out to others.”



University of Mary physical therapy students work with residents.



Stepping Stone Medical Respite offers a safe place to recover and a home-like, family environment. Sisters Rosemarie DeGracia, JoAnn Krebsbach and Idelle Badt join the residents for coffee and dessert.

As our work has grown, we have also taken a step to more clearly share who we are with the broader community. While our legal name remains Stepping Stone Ministries, we will now also operate under the name (DBA) *Stepping Stone Medical Respite*. This will help reduce confusion with another local organization and better communicate the life-changing services we provide.

It is difficult to fully express how meaningful this work is to us. We love what we do, and we see every day the difference it makes. In just over seven months, we have served more than 30 individuals. Of those who have been discharged, the overwhelming majority have transitioned into stable housing—into their own apartment, a home, or with family. A stable environment, combined with compassionate care and community, makes this transformation possible.

We are continually in awe as we witness how our residents change within the first few days of staying with us. Stability is life changing.

These outcomes are far more than numbers. They are stories of lives changed, dignity restored, and hope renewed.

As we look ahead, we do so with deep gratitude and great hope. We remain committed to learning, to serving, and to walking alongside each person who comes through our doors. We are especially grateful for the support, prayers, and encouragement of the wider community, including the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery, who share in this mission of care and compassion.

Please know that your support is making a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve.

Services We Provide



Private Bedroom



Bathroom



3 meals daily



Laundry access



Communal space



Phone and
computer access



Transportation to all
medical, mental
health, and addiction
services
appointments



Case Management
Services



Medical services for
medication
management,
education, and
monitoring

Honoring the Force Behind Ministry on the Margins

Sister Kathleen Atkinson made a life-changing phone call in 2010. Her call to see if she could offer any help at the N.D. Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation set the wheels in motion for what would become an important and well-recognized ministry in Bismarck. She remembers talking to a young man who was being released from prison. He was to be released into a city he didn't recognize, with nobody waiting to pick him up, no home, no belongings other than what he carried in a bag, and nowhere to turn. Sister Kathleen made the decision to pick him up and help him get to a place for shelter. She established connections for him to re-integrate into society outside of the prison walls.

She pondered this man's plight and wondered how many others were in a similar situation, or how many people, how many families, were falling through the cracks of the services in the community. She, and other concerned individuals, started a humble food pantry in 2013, appropriately named Ministry on the Margins. It didn't take long for the word to get out and people started coming in larger numbers, in need of food, blankets, pillows, and other daily living items. Local businesses generously donated money and products for those in need.

The ministry outgrew two locations prior to moving to the V J Spaedy building located on the corner of 24th Street and East Broadway Avenue, Bismarck. Services expanded from a food pantry to include prison re-entry programs, Stay-Out-of-Jail supper club, prayer services, daily living items, haircuts, foot care, clothing, street outreach and mentors to connect individuals with the resources they need.





Ministry on the Margins board members, Connie Sprynczynatyk and Beth Stroup Menge presented Sister Kathleen with a beautiful framed picture of the remarkable woman who founded Ministry on the Margins.

Post COVID pandemic, Sister Kathleen and her team identified a need to keep people safe during the bitter winter nights. In collaboration with city leadership, they formed a low-barrier overnight coffee house opening their doors to 60-70 people each night. Offering more than a safe place to stay and enjoy coffee and food, Ministry on the Margins offers hospitality, respect, dignity, and fellowship for those who enter its doors.

“Ministry on the Margins blesses not only those who come for services, it blesses the countless volunteers who find joy and fulfillment in helping others. Students, and service organizations often volunteer at the food pantry and in other capacities,” shares Sister Kathleen. Always valuing collaboration, Ministry on the Margins has become well-connected with the local service agencies, including law enforcement, health care organizations, churches, and local or state leadership groups working together to achieve goals in addressing homelessness.

Sister Kathleen retired at the end of December 2025, leaving the ministry in the capable hands of interim executive director, Father Joe Hubbard, and her team of employees, volunteers, and Board of Directors. “It wasn’t as difficult to pass the torch as one might expect,” says Sister Kathleen. “I have confidence in the expertise and dedication of the team.” She adds, “I found peace in knowing the time was right to devote myself to other projects that have been on the backburner.” One of those projects is writing a book based on Ministry on the Margins.



Lt. to rt.: Gail Hagerty and Ministry on the Margins staff – John Dolbec, Nate Mikkelsen, Sister Kathleen Atkinson, Kris Morrisette, Beth Stroup Menge, and Sister Nicole Kunze, Prioress of Annunciation Monastery.



Bismarck City Commissioners Lt. to rt.: Anne Cleary, Michael Connelly, Mayor Michael Schmitz, John Risch, and Greg Zenker extended their congratulations to Sister Kathleen.

The Bismarck City Commission honored Sister Kathleen with a surprise proclamation—December 10, 2025, was proclaimed “Sister Kathleen Atkinson Day” by Mayor Michael Schmitz who presented the award to her for her contributions to helping those in need. Sister Kathleen was also awarded a Senate Congressional Record Tribute at her retirement celebration at Ministry on the Margins.

Father Joe Hubbard Leads New Season of Ministry

Fr. Joe Hubbard, an Episcopal Priest in the Diocese of North Dakota, is the Ministry's Interim Executive Director.

Father Joe shares: "Much of my ministry as a priest has been alongside unsheltered relatives, and I know all too well the opportunities and challenges our community is facing in the coming months. As a priest on Navajoland, I oversaw a feeding ministry during COVID that served 500 families across southeastern Utah, and I helped plan, develop, and construct a tiny house community to offer affordable housing to our community. While in Rapid City, SD, I helped organize a community response to the city-mandated shuttering of the only daytime warming center as Winter began. In Scottsbluff, NE, I served as the interim Executive Director of the Lakota Lutheran Center at a time when unsheltered relatives were living in a tent city on our property, and I helped coordinate faith-based and community services to ensure that all our relatives had safe, warm housing for the winter. The relationships I formed with these communities in times of crisis, I believe, have uniquely prepared me to walk with our Ministry on the Margins community through this season of transition and into a new season of ministry." Fr. Joe works closely with the Ministry's Staff and Board of Directors to sustain the day-to-day operations and support the team to carry on the legacy that Sister Kathleen has created with Ministry on the Margins.



In Loving Memory

Sister Grace Dahmus



Sister Grace Dahmus

Born: May 29, 1939

Professed: July 11, 1959

Died: February 25, 2026

**Mass of Christian Burial:
March 3, 2026**

Born in Arkansas, Sister Grace (baptized Mary) was the fourth of the eight children born to Rudolph and Catherine (Engel) Dahmus. Her family moved to a farm in Regent, ND, when she was one year old. Her sentiment, even in her eighties was, “You can take the girl out of the country but never the country out of the girl.”

Describing her more than 22 years as an elementary teacher in the gamut of grades from one to six, she delighted in recounting stories of children’s antics and remarks. Being with children was a source of growth and grace for Sister Grace. After teaching, she served in Pastoral Care at St. Alexius, as a CNA, and as a classroom and library volunteer.

Through years of diminished eyesight, Sister Grace gratefully utilized the resource of “talking books.” She enthusiastically shared interesting tidbits of information from the vast array of knowledge gained. Sister Grace enjoyed making greeting cards for University of Mary women students and periodically wrote poems.

At the time of her 60th Jubilee of monastic profession, Sister Grace advised: “Live one day at a time and put your faith and trust in God’s hands.”

We entrust Sister Grace into the rest and affection of God’s love in company with her namesake, Mary.

May almighty God bless us with his peace and strength, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. May the Angels lead thee into Paradise. May the Martyrs receive thee at thy coming and take thee to the Holy City. May the Choirs of the Angels receive thee and mayest thou have rest everlasting. Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her. May she rest in peace. Amen.

Moderation: Theme of Sponsorship Formation Day



Standing, lt. to rt.: Sisters Idelle Badt, Agnes Reinert, Raphaela Cady, Mariah Dietz, Renee Zastoupil, Kathleen Atkinson; speaker Michael Weisbeck, Sisters Agatha Muggli and Janet Zander. Seated, lt. to rt.: Sisters Nicole Kunze, Eleanor Stockert, Nancy Gunderson, Madelyn Louttit, JoAnn Krebsbach, Rosanne Zastoupil and Rosemary DeGracia.

The Fifteenth Annual Sponsorship Formation Day event was held May 7, 2026. This event, sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery, is a unique opportunity to bring leaders from the sisters' sponsored ministries together for a day of learning and sharing. The sisters sponsor CHI St. Alexius Health, the University of Mary, and Ministry on the Margins, and support our newest ministry, Stepping Stone Medical Respite.



Dr. Jonathon Reyes



Michael Weisbeck

“This year’s theme of “Moderation” is very much aligned with the Rule of St. Benedict, where moderation is a focus throughout,” says Sister Nicole Kunze, Prioress.

Sister Nicole Kunze, Dr. Jonathon Reyes, and Michael Weisbeck were this year’s presenters.



The RB72 Retreat Girls Brought Sunshine on a Cloudy Day!

Sister Marena Hoogland hosted a middle school girls' retreat, May 28-30, which offers a glimpse into monastic life. The girls learn about the Rule of St. Benedict, and what it means to prefer nothing whatever to Christ. These girls also spent time helping in the sisters' garden, learning about Stepping Stone Medical Respite, playing games, prayer journaling, and enjoying conversation and meals together and with the sisters. We keep these faith-filled girls in our prayers!



In Loving Memory of Our Oblates, Volunteers, Friends: Zanne Ness and Dennis Larkin



On April 19, our dear oblate, volunteer, and friend, **Zanne Ness**, entered eternal life. Zanne has been a part of the mission of the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery for decades. In serving as a priest at St. George's Episcopal Church, she was dedicated to her role as an Oblate of Annunciation Monastery and volunteered at the monastery switchboard where she welcomed all who entered with hospitality, a genuine smile and her serene presence.

She was committed to social justice causes, particularly focusing on the homeless, the hungry, and the imprisoned. She established an oblate formation program in the prison, sponsored by Annunciation Monastery. She was also a cherished volunteer at Ministry on the Margins.

Zanne was invested in others and served with love and humility. Her husband, Terry, has been a blessing to our monastic community as well. Thank you, Zanne, for being a treasured part of our Benedictine family.

Dennis Larkin, a dedicated monastery volunteer, and treasured member of the Bismarck community, entered eternal life on May 27.

Dennis began volunteering at the switchboard at Annunciation Monastery in 2007. Soon his dear wife, Lynda, joined him and the two quickly became a delightful and welcoming presence. Following Lynda's passing, Dennis continued his ministry of service, faithfully volunteering each week and becoming a beloved greeter at the monastery's front desk.



An Oblate of Annunciation Monastery, a member of the Bismarck-Mandan Serra Club, and a volunteer with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Dennis lived a life marked by generosity, humility, and service to others. He had a special concern for those in need and generously shared his time and talents, faithfully attending events and supporting the ministries and communities he loved.

We will miss his quiet, devoted presence, his warm friendship, and his unmistakable Rhode Island accent. We give thanks for the many ways Dennis enriched our community and trust that he now rests in the peace and joy of eternal life.

Nun Run Offers A Glimpse Into Religious Life



The Bismarck-Mandan “Nun Run,” held May 9, offered a unique vocation opportunity for high school aged women. This “day tour” was a collaborative effort among the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery, the Servants of the Children of Light, and the St. Mary Sisters to provide an opportunity for these young women to learn about the different religious communities living and ministering in our area.



Come & See Retreats

These incredible faith-filled women joined our sisters for “Come & See” vocation discernment retreats. If you, or anyone you know, are interested in learning more about life as a Benedictine Sister of Annunciation Monastery, please reach out to Sister Nicole Kunze at 701-255-1520.



Sometimes it is Mostly Fun and Games!

St. Mary's Academy students from Sister Marena Hoogland's fifth grade math class joined the sisters for an afternoon of games and conversation. It was a joy to have these wonderful students with us!





Serving Sundaes and Smiles at St. Alexius

Our sisters love interacting with the staff at St. Alexius, especially during Mission Week! Sisters served ice cream with all of the fixings over the lunch hour on March 24!

St. Alexius was founded in 1885 by our Benedictine foremothers. At that time, it was the only hospital between Seattle, Washington, and Saint Paul, Minnesota! Since its founding, St. Alexius adheres to the mission to, *“Let all be received as Christ.”* Thank you to all who serve at St. Alexius.



THANK YOU!

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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 mission advancement, (701) 355-8907 or: jill@annunciationmonastery.org

Vocations Jamboree at the University of Mary

Our sisters joined other religious communities and representatives from missionary organizations and service groups for the University of Mary Vocations Jamboree. This is an opportunity for students to learn about the life and charism of each place.



Sisters Agnes Reinert and Nicole Kunze, prioress, enjoyed visiting with those who stopped by the Annunciation Monastery booth.



The Crow's Nest cafeteria was hopping and Sisters JoAnn Krebsbach and Mariah Dietz took meal tickets and offered Benedictine hospitality and big smiles!