



# Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

FALL/WINTER 2018

www.annunciationmonastery.org



*Lt. to rt.: Sister Nancy Miller, Krista Ferrell, Marena Hoogland, Sister Nicole Kunze and Mary Ruth Kayute await the joyful novitiate ceremony.*

## *We Thank God for Our Three Novices!*

On October 14, sisters, family and guests gathered to witness the reception of Krista Ferrell, Marena Hoogland and Mary Ruth Kayute into the novitiate. Sister Nancy Miller served as their postulant director and now they are under the direction of novice director, Sister Agatha Muggli. As novices, they will deepen their spiritual lives and knowledge of Benedictine life by devoting one full year to study and reflection on the Rule of St. Benedict and the Benedictine tradition, and participating in all facets of monastic life. In order for novices to give themselves to this formative experience, involvement in activities external to the monastic community is limited.

As prioress, Sister Nicole Kunze shared with the novices, “We welcome you as our companions in our life of prayer, lectio and service. We thank God for stirring up this call in your hearts.”

*Story continues on page 3*



MESSAGE FROM THE

# Prioress

Living daily in gratitude can be difficult. Gratitude expands our hearts, takes the focus off ourselves and turns it towards a deep appreciation for all we have received. Our community is grateful for all the ways you enrich our lives.

I dare to say that one of the most-often quoted verses from the Rule of Benedict is regarding hospitality to guests: “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*” (RB 53:1) There are always guests at the monastery and our lives are enriched by their presence. If you have been our guest, you have been greeted and hosted by Sister Gemma, our long-time guest director. Sister Gemma’s tireless work in greeting guests, preparing guest rooms, and seeing that their every need is met is a wonderful example of Benedict’s tenet of hospitality.

This past July we offered hospitality to the Federation of Saint Benedict, a group of ten monasteries from around the world. Our community belongs to this federation. We were happy to host the triennial gathering for the prioresses and delegates from the member monasteries and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Sisters came from Minnesota, Illinois, Washington, the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, and Japan. The theme of our meeting

was “Walking into the Future, Tending the Benedictine Charism.” Linda Romey, OSB (Erie, PA) challenged us to enter into processes of deep change in our monasteries and share the experience of monasticism in new ways. Our monastery continues to explore and discern ways we can adapt our structures to assist us in living a vibrant Benedictine life now and into the future.

On October 14, our community celebrated the reception of three novices. Welcoming a woman who is seriously pursuing her call to monastic life in our community is always a joyous occasion. To be “thrice blessed” is wonderful! The three women, Krista, Marena, and Mary Ruth, bring their own gifts and talents to share with us and God’s people. During this upcoming year, they will study and learn more about our Benedictine way of life and take time for prayer and reflection as they listen with the ear of their hearts to God’s calling in their lives. Please pray for them during this special year of formation.

As this year comes to a close, our hearts are full, grateful for the many gifts we have received from God. Thank you for supporting us through your gifts of time, talent and treasure.

God bless you!

*Sister Nicole Kunze*

**Krista:** “I have been living at the monastery for the last year during my postulancy and I have discerned with the sisters that I am ready to move forward into the novitiate. I am graced to be moving forward in my formation at Annunciation Monastery. This next year will be a wonderful year of personal and spiritual growth. I am eager to learn more about my faith through the classes I will take this year.”



**Marena:** “Two days after I entered the novitiate, I read a quote by author Matthew Warner, ‘Regardless of where you are in life, God’s plan involves you making the right decisions right now. Why wait until later to start being the person that God made you to be?’ Throughout my discernment process, I’ve learned to take things day by day, to look at the right now. Today, in this moment, I really believe that God is calling me to be a novice at Annunciation Monastery, and I have found peace in my

decision. Knowing that this is just one step along the way makes it a very doable thing for me. During this deeper and more intentional level of discernment, as I study about Benedictine spirituality and the community of Annunciation Monastery, I look forward to the classes taught by the Sisters. I think this year will be full of growth as I learn more about what God has in store for my life and pray that my heart and mind remain open as it unfolds.”



**Mary Ruth:** “I appreciate Benedictine spirituality and monastic life. The Rule of Benedict is practical wisdom that includes listening, hospitality, and continually seeking God.”



**“I look forward to walking with Krista, Marena and Mary Ruth over the next year, exploring with them the wisdom Benedict offers in the Rule and helping them take on our community’s way of monastic living.”**

**Sister Agatha Muggli, novice director**

# Welcome Oblates

## Marge Brandt, Jane Greer, Joy Wesolowski, Jeffrey Johnson

In two beautiful ceremonies in October, sisters, oblates and family gathered to welcome Marge Brandt, Jane Greer, Joy Wesolowski and Jeffrey Johnson as Oblates of Annunciation Monastery. Oblates are lay women and men of varied faith backgrounds who associate themselves with a monastic community and strive to live according to the Rule of St. Benedict as their state in life permits.

“Our oblates are such a blessing to us, and we hope to be a blessing to them, as we learn and grow closer to God and to one another,” says Sister Patricia Schap, oblate director. Oblates are a vital part of the monastic community. Oblates enhance their spiritual journey through relationships with the sisters and other oblates, and by attending monthly oblate meetings. They strive to recognize God’s presence in ordinary daily life.

### *Jeffrey Johnson shared his thoughts from the day of his oblation:*

*“Both Sister Thomas and Sister Gerard asked if I felt any different after officially becoming an oblate of Annunciation Monastery. I responded, ‘It is a perfect day; it’s such a feeling of family. It’s like I’m not a guest anymore, but family. On one hand, nothing has changed. On the other hand, **everything** has changed. I feel so supported by this monastic community. So much of what I do in my work comes from what I’ve learned from the sisters who have shaped and molded my life.’”*



*(Top photo) Jeffrey Johnson came all the way from Milwaukee, WI, to make his oblation at Annunciation Monastery on October 20, 2018. Sister Nicole Kunze and Sister Patricia Schap receive Jeff as an oblate and present him with the Rule of St. Benedict.*

*(Bottom photo) Pictured left to right: Sisters Patricia Schap and Nicole Kunze, Jeffrey Johnson and Sister Rosemary DeGracia*





*Left to right: Sister Patricia Schap, Jane Greer (oblate), Sister Nicole Kunze, Marge Brandt (oblate), Sister Rosemary DeGracia and Joy Wesolowski (oblate) celebrate with family, friends and the monastic community after the oblation ceremony held October 7, 2018.*



*Oblates of Annunciation Monastery*



*Photo by: Deacon Joe Krupinsky*

## FEDERATION OF ST. BENEDICT:

# *Sisters Tend the Benedictine Charism*

The Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery were honored to host the general chapter meeting of the Federation of St. Benedict from July 24-29. The Federation of St. Benedict is an international congregation of 10 Benedictine women's monasteries. The theme of this year's chapter meeting was, "Tending the Benedictine Charism."

Sister delegates are from:

Annunciation Monastery, North Dakota

St. Benedict's Monastery, Minnesota

St. Paul's Monastery, Minnesota

St. Scholastica Monastery, Minnesota

St. Placid Priory, Washington

St. Mary Monastery, Illinois

St. Benedict's Monastery, Japan

St. Benedict Monastery, Taiwan

St. Martin Monastery, Bahamas

Monasterio Santa Escolastica, Puerto Rico



*Sisters Grace, Ruth Margaret, Terence, JoAnn, Claire and Elizabeth filled "blessing bags" for the Sisters of the Federation of St. Benedict. Each bag was hand-painted by Sister Nancy Gunderson who designed the logo for the chapter meeting.*

# Sketch Reveals God's Plan

by Sister Idelle Badt

In July I spent three weeks at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, ID, to attend the Benedictine Spirituality Workshop and Retreat (BSWR), something that every Benedictine Sister attends in preparation for her final vows. While there, I spent a great deal of time praying about my vocation as a sister, but, admittedly, I also spent a good deal of time praying and worrying about what I was going to do when I got back to Bismarck. The time had come to go back into the world and work, but where? Who had openings for social workers? Would anyone even want to hire me when I had not worked outside the monastery for three years?

The last week of BSWR was a silent retreat. Upon meeting with my spiritual director on the first day, I was given the task of either composing a song or drawing a picture of how I thought God saw me. Composing a song seemed much too daunting a task so I went with drawing a picture. I had unknowingly come to Idaho prepared for this task. I have a propensity for doodling, so I had brought colored pencils and a drawing tablet with me.



After lunch on this day, I grabbed my Bible, pencils, and paper and hiked up the side of a mountain to the sisters' cemetery. I found a bench, cleaned it off, and got to work. I prayed about what God wanted me to do and I started to draw. By the end of the afternoon, I had a picture of me sitting on the side of a hospital bed holding a dying woman's hand. My free hand was reaching back to take God's hand for guidance. Later that evening, Sister Nicole, my prioress, called to see if I would be interested in a job at the Church of Corpus Christi

working in funeral ministry. It was most definitely a God moment—I had literally just drawn a picture of my future job!

In my worry about finding a job, parish work had not crossed my mind. Now it seems kind of silly because social work is a natural fit in a parish, especially for me. I am doing the same kind of work I might do in a secular job, but working in a parish allows me to incorporate a spiritual aspect when working with people. I can talk about God and not worry that I am going to get into trouble for doing it. I also do not have to spend most of my time completing paperwork; I can be a presence for people during one of the worst times of their lives.

I have learned that God truly does answer prayers; sometimes we just need to sit in silence and listen with the ear of our hearts to hear what he is saying. When I did this, the answer I received was far greater than what I had hoped for.

## SISTER GEMMA PETERS:

# *The Face of Hospitality*



**I**n a society obsessed with counting steps, Sister Gemma Peters likely has hers in before noon. She doesn't need a Fitbit or a pedometer. As coordinator of the Annunciation Monastery Hospitality Center and Guest Ministry for 18 years, Sister Gemma has welcomed countless guests with her gentle, unassuming spirit.

"Sister Gemma's example of Benedictine hospitality is one we should all emulate," says Sister Nicole Kunze, prioress. "She has the unique gift of welcoming guests warmly and making them feel at home. Spiritual enrichment programs, personal retreats, meetings and special events run without a hitch due to Sister Gemma's diligence and attention to detail." Often those details consist of homemade breads, bars and other mouthwatering treats, made by Sister Gemma herself.

People of all ages and walks of life are drawn to Sister Gemma. She shares her knowledge of Breuer architecture and monastic life as well as her wisdom, spirituality and delightful sense of humor. Sister Gemma leads tours and coordinates guest rooms for those seeking a prayerful space to rest, pray or just get away from the busyness of daily life. Several guests of Annunciation Monastery have become lifelong friends with Sister Gemma. Among them is author, Candace Simar, who finds the monastery the perfect setting to write her books. Simar says, "I love Sister Gemma. She has been a strong influence for Christ in my life."

Sister Gemma continues to serve the monastic community with love and reverence in the sacristy, faithfully preparing for prayer and Eucharistic liturgies. Thank you, Sister Gemma, for your faithfulness to prayer, community and service, and for your example of extravagant Benedictine hospitality!



*Sister Gemma shows hospitality to people of all ages.*



*Sister Gemma's breads are a favorite!*



*Sister Gemma with friends, Keith and Candace Simar.*



*Sister Gemma points out interesting features in the monastery chapel.*

*"Gemma is the saint I needed, Gemma is God's face for me, Gemma is the one who taught me that God is love, not fear. Without her guidance I never would have had the faith, then or now, to listen and respond to God's voice in my heart. Isn't that what saints are supposed to do, show us how God wants us to live, how to stretch and grow so that we see God's face in others and be God's face for others? That's Gemma." ~ Linda Stewart*

Linda Stewart met Sister Gemma in 2001, right after the sisters moved into the new monastery. Linda was living in Livingston, MT, and had never heard of Annunciation Monastery until a friend of hers attended a music workshop at the University of Mary and found out about the monastery. Linda says, "I was going through a difficult time in my life and my friend literally sent me to the monastery. I called Sister Gemma, not even knowing what I was asking for."

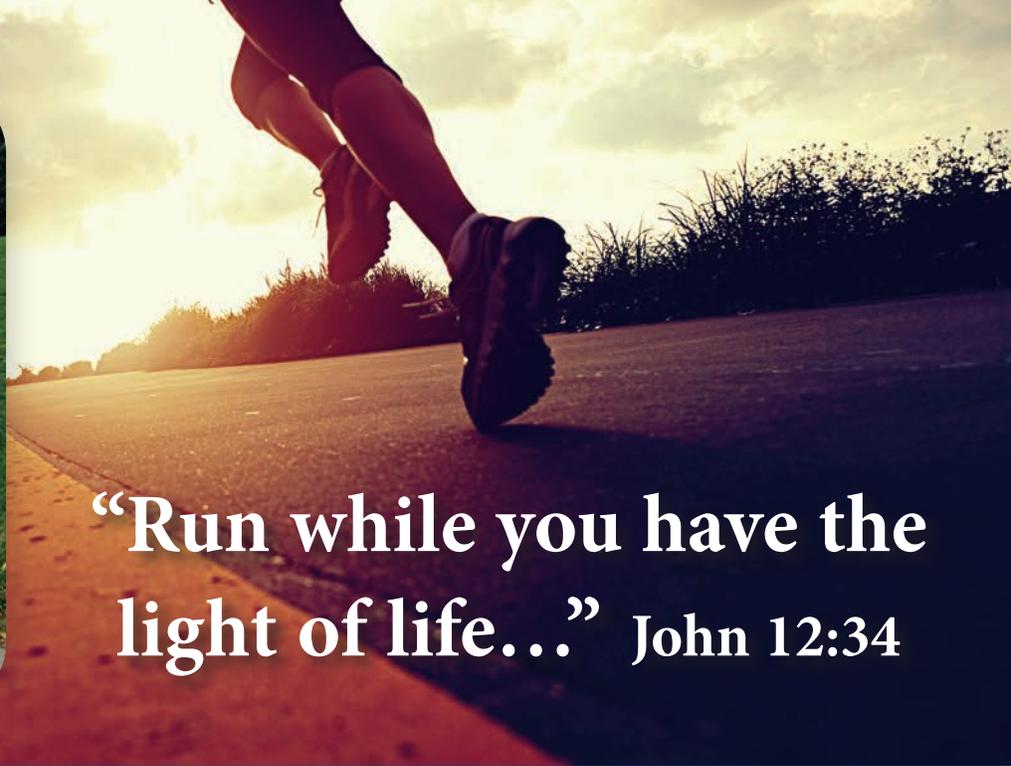
Linda immediately bonded with Sister Gemma over the phone, as Sister Gemma said, "Yes, come visit us. I'll pick you up at the airport." "Sister Gemma took me under her wing and she and all of the sisters were so welcoming; the hospitality and love I received was remarkable. It changed my life." The next spring, Sister Gemma called to see if Linda would be interested in coming to Bismarck for the summer to work in the monastery garden. Unhesitatingly, Linda said "Yes!" She even volunteered the summer after that. Linda felt she had found what was missing in her life.

After learning that the University of Mary offered a degree in radiology, a field that interested Linda, she took a leap of faith and left her secure teaching job, health insurance and retirement plan to move to Bismarck and go to school. She says she knew she needed to be close to the sisters.

"Everything just seemed to come together once I met the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. Through them, the University of Mary, and then my work in radiology at CHI St. Alexius Health, I felt grounded in the Benedictine value of hospitality, to 'let all be received as Christ.' It was so needed in my life; it's still what I need. Sister Gemma's confidence that I came here for a reason gave me the faith to follow God's promptings, even when it doesn't make sense."



*Linda Stewart and Sister Gemma became friends the moment they met, over the phone.*



“Run while you have the light of life...” John 12:34

Sister Melissa Cote has never considered herself an athlete, until now. “Growing up in Rolla, ND, it was pretty much expected that you play sports in high school,” she admits. “I begrudgingly played basketball and kind of enjoyed volleyball, but that was it! I was a thrower in track, but I was never a runner. In fact, I recall our track coach having to chase us to get us to run.”

A full-time pharmacist at CHI St. Alexius Health, Sister Melissa is active at work, but wasn't engaged in real heart-pumping activity. She went to the gym frequently, but felt she had hit a plateau. Sister Melissa's 40th birthday was approaching. This inspired her to do something good for herself. She set a goal to run a 5K race. She says, “I didn't know how to start training. There are many running plans online, but I knew I wouldn't do it without guidance and accountability.

“Through the gym, I heard about the GYS Track Club, which is run by April Lund. April is a great coach. She taught me how to train and eat to support my healthy new lifestyle.” Sister Melissa doubted her own ability when she first started,

but people were so encouraging that she started to believe it when they said, “You run so fast!” “I enjoy running at a fast pace. The first mile is always the hardest, but after that I get into a groove and it gets easier,” she says.

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*“When Sister Melissa first approached me to discuss the running club, she was very unsure. She said, ‘I don't think I will really like this, but I'm going to give it a try.’ Since she started running at the end of January, she has not only changed her life but the lives of so many others. She is an inspiration to everyone she meets. She is one of my hardest working athletes, and it shows in her performance. We have also enjoyed spending time with the other sisters as they come out to volunteer and cheer her on at events.” ~ April Lund*

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Members of the track club get together weekly to exercise as a group. They are also given a plan to do exercises on their own. “Usually the goal is to prepare for an upcoming race. Some members are walkers, and that is perfectly fine,” Sister Melissa explains. “It's all about being healthy, being accountable, and encouraging one another. That is an amazing benefit.”

Sister Melissa sees her outdoor runs as a prayerful time to appreciate God's creation. "I have an awareness of things I wouldn't normally notice if I were to simply drive by them." She also enjoys listening to adventure-packed audio books while she runs. She explains, "A good book is a great distraction."

Since beginning the GYS track club, Sister Melissa has completed a 10K and 15K run, three 5Ks and a half marathon. No longer intimidated by long runs, she is training for a full marathon.

Sister Melissa has experienced many blessings since changing her lifestyle. "I am so grateful for the support of my Benedictine Sisters who encourage me. They notice a difference in my energy level. I feel much better and I find myself looking forward to moving more and sitting less."

*Sister Melissa Cote displays her medal from her first half marathon.*



## "Joyful Spirit" Day For Girls



*Another great group of girls attended the Joyful Spirit Day in July.*

# French Art Curator Adds Annunciation Monastery to Whirlwind Breuer Architecture Tour

On their first visit to the United States from the south of France, Stéphane Boudin-Lestienne and Patrice Gautier made Annunciation Monastery and the University of Mary a stopping point to view Breuer architecture, following St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church in Muskegon, MI, and St. John's Abbey Church, Collegetown, MN. Boudin-Lestienne is an art historian and curator, and expert on Marcel Breuer.

It is always enriching to hear about Marcel Breuer, who designed the beautiful buildings we see and enjoy every day.



*Sister Thomas Welder and Sister Nicole Kunze welcomed Stéphane Boudin-Lestienne and Patrice Gautier to Annunciation Monastery.*

## *Thank You to Our Volunteer, Carol Andreini!*

Carol Andreini is a professor of classical studies at the University of Mary. She recalls an early conversation with Sister Nancy Gunderson when the topic of volunteering at the monastery switchboard surfaced. Carol had recently lost her beloved dog and had some extra time on her hands.

“I had never worked on a switchboard before, but I thought I'd like to give it a try. I really liked the idea of getting to know the sisters better, especially the ones I might not meet otherwise. I started working Tuesday afternoons at the monastery and enjoy it. The sisters are friendly, hospitable and very Benedictine,” says Carol. “It's fun to visit with them and they continually assure me of their prayers, which is so beautiful.”

When Carol is not teaching or volunteering, she likes to knit, go for walks, and read mysteries.



# Ministry on the Margins Fifth Anniversary Celebration

On the first weekend of November, *Ministry on the Margins* celebrated its fifth anniversary with a weekend of conferences featuring internationally known speaker and author, Carol Kent. Carol and her husband spoke from their personal experience on the topic *When a Loved One is Incarcerated – Embracing a New Kind of Normal*. “They speak from hearts that understand what it’s like to navigate a new normal, offering hope and healing from a Biblical perspective,” says Sister Kathleen Atkinson. In continuation of the celebration, Carol Kent offered a Saturday morning conference for women titled *Unquenchable Faith*.

Sister Kathleen Atkinson, founder and director of *Ministry on the Margins*, describes its development as a journey of changed lives, beginning with hers. The Ministry serves over 700 people each week with an average of 70 volunteers. It has been nationally recognized for its creative prison ministry, prison reentry ministry, and grass roots service to “those who fall through the cracks, especially during times of transition.” The food pantry distributes 3,000 - 4,000 pounds of food each week. A free clothing pantry serves hundreds. Ministry on the Margins is affiliated with the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery and is located at 201 N. 24th Street, Bismarck.



*Sister Kathleen plays with a little boy at the ministry. The focus is simple: changing lives through kindness and compassion.*

# Hospitality in Many Languages



By Sister Hannah Vanorny

I met the Pope in person. He gave me a warm smile, took my hands in his, and seemed to really listen when I whispered to him how much I appreciate his compassion and kindness toward all people. A Vatican official took a lovely picture of this exchange.

This happened in September as part of my experience in Rome at the Eighth International CIB (Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum) Symposium. It is a gathering of over one hundred Benedictine women from all over the world held at the college of Sant'Anselmo every four years. Most of the Benedictines in attendance are prioresses and heads of congregations. A few newer sisters also get to attend, and I was lucky enough to be in that group. I represented the newest and youngest sisters from the United States. This year's theme was: "Let all be welcomed as Christ."

I love Pope Francis and the impact he has on the world with his gentle and empathetic manner, but meeting him was not the highlight of my trip. I loved visiting the Benedictine sites of Monte Cassino and Subiaco, but again, those visits were not the high points of my Rome experience. My favorite part of the symposium was simply getting to know Benedictine women from around the world.

I met sisters from Italy, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Austria, Germany, Poland, Australia, the Czech Republic, Brazil, Ukraine, India, Israel, England, the Philippines, and countries in Africa. The sisters spoke many languages, and many did not speak English. We spent much of the time at assigned tables listening to speakers and holding small group discussions. Out of six people at my table (including myself), three did not speak English. They spoke Italian, Vietnamese, and German. Every time I said something, it had to be translated three times! What a different experience for me! I had to speak slowly (for the translators), use a lot of impromptu sign language, and say less than what I would normally put forth – there just was not time for me to give long speeches that had to be translated multiple times.

We sat with different people every day at meals. A few times I sat next to someone who spoke only French. It was interesting trying to have a conversation! I became close to three Sisters from the Czech Republic, Germany, and Austria. They spoke English, but all three were more comfortable speaking



*None of us could understand every language being spoken, but we could all understand the sentiment and meaning behind the words.*

German. They would often start conversations in English and then lapse into German, forgetting that I couldn't understand them!

As soon as I learned I would attend the symposium, I knew I'd meet Benedictine women from all over the world. I did not, however, realize the connection I would feel with them. I was unprepared for the strong Benedictine bond I felt with every woman I met. We came from different countries and cultures, but we found common ground around the symposium's theme of hospitality. As Benedictines, we believe in the supreme importance of hospitality in our lives, as practiced both inside of our communities and out. We all base our community structure around the Rule of St. Benedict. We all pray the Liturgy of the Hours and live monastic lives centered in community. We all believe in a benevolent God whose ultimate message is grounded in love—a love we feel called to spread to others. Our similarities in beliefs and lifestyle, as dictated by the Rule of St. Benedict, came out again and again in our interactions and conversations with one another. As we celebrated Mass in Italian or French or Spanish—as we prayed the Liturgy of the Hours in Swahili or Swedish or Sri Lankan—we all felt that strong Benedictine bond permeating our relationships and time together.

In the opening ceremony of the symposium, the sisters started chains of welcome around the room. We each went up to another sister and said in our own language a line from Matthew 25 that is quoted in the Rule of St. Benedict: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." The other sister then answered with the same line, in her own language, and turned to the sister next to her to continue the chain of welcome. The room was filled with the sounds of women welcoming one another in over twenty languages. None of us could understand every language being spoken, but we could all understand the sentiment and meaning behind the words. No matter where we come from, we all understood in that moment that we are connected in our Benedictine bond and love for one another—a love that Benedictine communities, each in our own way, try to spread each day through our practice of hospitality.

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*"For I was hungry and  
you gave me food..."*

Matthew 25:35

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## **Sisters Help Fill Backpacks for Kids**

As a member of the Mission Integration Committee at CHI St. Alexius Health, Sister Agatha Muggli (pictured) and Sister Mariah Dietz, chair of the Mission Integration Committee, joined associates from CHI St. Alexius Health, Conifer, Sodexo and G4S in filling backpacks with food for Community Action's Backpack for Kids Program. This program was developed to address the need for food for children who are identified as being homeless. Backpacks of food are taken to the schools on Friday and given to the children in need. The children return them the following week to be refilled.

**Thank you to Community Action and all who participate in feeding God's children.**