

# SEEKPRAYSHARE

SISTERS OF ST. BENEDICT OF FERDINAND, INDIANA

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 2 | SUMMER 2022



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This year, the Sisters of St. Benedict celebrate 155 years at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand. And throughout the second half of this issue of *Seek Pray Share*, you'll see a timeline that documents some of the most significant milestones of our history as a community.

As I reflect on that history and our place in it, I'm encouraged in so many ways.

Our younger Sisters just took part in a conference with their peers to think strategically about how their communities can and should move forward in a time when fewer women are choosing religious life. Their energy and insight give me great hope for the future of this community and others like it.

As you'll read in this issue, our own Sister Jill continues to spend time with women who are trying to decide whether they are being called to this life and this community. Two of those women are now "discerning," the earliest stage of moving toward becoming a Sister.

Everywhere, I see this community continually supported by your generosity, your friendship and your prayers as we minister to others. Know that we thank God for you every day, and pray for you as well.

May God bless you and yours,

*Anita Louise Lowe, OSB*

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB  
Prioress

# From Minnesota...

If you've been missing Sister Jane Becker, so have we! But she's been very busy up north in Minnesota as Administrator of Mount Saint Benedict Monastery in Crookston, Minnesota. And Crookston isn't for the faint of heart; the internet reassures us that the temperature "is rarely below -20°F." Brrrr!

The history of the monastery began when Sisters from Saint Cloud started Villa Saint Scholastica Monastery, from which Mother Eustacia Beyenka and forty-two sisters established Mount Saint Benedict Monastery. Since the founding of Mount Saint Benedict, Sisters have been involved primarily in healing and teaching ministries throughout the state. The community has made the difficult decision to close the monastery, and Sister Jane Becker has braved the Minnesota winters to help wind things down in a compassionate and thoughtful manner.



# ...to Jamaica.

Since last year, our own Sister Roxanne has been back in Jamaica instead of at the monastery in Ferdinand. Challenges getting paperwork through immigration resulted in her work permit as a religious worker expiring before it could be renewed.

While the wheels are turning very slowly, they are turning. We've currently submitted the first set of paperwork to apply for a new religious worker visa for her. Once this process is complete and she is approved, she can return to the monastery in Ferdinand.

Once she's back with us, we'll file a request to change her status and apply for permanent residency. That involves several more rounds of paperwork, and Sister Roxanne will go through an interview process. We'll just be glad to have her back at Monastery Immaculate Conception, where she is sorely missed from the bakery to the Scrabble table.



*Srs. Roxanne Cassandra Higgins, Anita Louise Lowe, Mary Judith Fleig & Judy Dewig*



# Gentle Reader

How Sister Mary George  
created lifelong readers.

You can't teach for 71 years as Sister Mary George Kissel did and not have an impact. After entering the community in Ferdinand in 1940, she used her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in teaching elementary students in schools all across southwest Indiana, as well as teaching English to elementary students in Bogota, Colombia.

But in 1975, Sister Mary George and her biological sister, Sister Margaret Carolyn Kissel, started a program that would be life-changing for many students.

The pair established The Reading Carrell in Evansville, and for the next 38 years, they worked with students who were falling behind because of serious struggles with reading.

Often, those students came to her program hating school, where they struggled and faced cruel jokes from other children. Many had parents who both had to work, so they couldn't receive the same support at home as their classmates did.

"When the teachers have 30 or more students in the class, they can't give the kids individual attention, and when both parents work, who's going to help the kids?" Sister Mary George wondered.

With her Benedictine approach and gentle nature, however, the children were constantly reassured that they were good, that they weren't "dumb," and that they could master the concepts. With the help of the two Sisters, the students in their program caught up with their peers. In fact, a number of them graduated at the top of their high school and college classes.



The gentle encouragement offered by The Reading Carrell has inspired many people. One former second grade student of Sister Mary

George's let her know she was heading off to college to become a teacher, saying

"I'm going to watch out for the kids who can't keep up, like you did with me."

Another student went on to become a doctor and spent decades practicing medicine in the area, at-

tributing his success directly to

the two Sisters. Over the course of nearly four decades, the pair served over 5,500 children and their families.

*"I was one of Sister Mary George's elementary students. There was a DEAR sign in their tiny waiting room, which meant Drop Everything And Read. She was dear to many of us who learned the basic concept of reading with her guidance."*

Bryan R.

While Sister Mary George retired from teaching at age 90, she hardly slowed down, continuing to collect food, clothing and school supplies for poor communities throughout the Owensboro area and beyond.

She also collected religious items, such as rosaries and prayer cards, to be donated to area religious education directors for use in their programs with students. And she's still just as sweet as ever.



#### **SISTERS TWICE OVER**

*Sister Mary George's beloved sister and Reading Carrell partner, Sister Margaret Carolyn Kissel, died at age 84 in 2013.*



# Boomerang Benedictine.



Diane Weiss-Altstadt grew up in a very Catholic family. In 1967, when she graduated from Catholic high school in Evansville, “there wasn’t much opportunity for women. You could get married or go to the convent.”

Diane didn’t want to get married, so she became a Sister of St. Benedict at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand. But almost from the beginning, she struggled with the idea that perhaps she wanted something that she hadn’t really been called to.

She wrestled with her dilemma, and after 17 years, made the difficult decision to leave the community. She left on good terms, and felt completely supported by the Sisters in her decision.

“I am Benedictine through and through,” she says today. “I love it. I never have a second’s regret about spending seventeen years here. Nor do I regret leaving.” She felt like a sister to the Sisters, and still marvels at how they have continued to welcome her over the years.

Diane met and married Wayne Altstadt and went to work for the government. In January of 2013, she retired. Her husband had already done so, and she was looking forward to spending time traveling together.

But just three months after she retired, Wayne was diagnosed with terminal cancer, and given between six weeks and six months to live. Three months later, he was gone.

In some ways, his disease brought Diane more closely into the Sisters’ orbit once again. “Wayne had gotten to know a lot of the Sisters through me,” she recalls. “He would ask for them by name, and they would come to visit him.”

She says that losing her husband strengthened her faith, and her awareness of a good God whose timing is perfect. Looking back, she can see where God was preparing the couple to deal with his death.

After Wayne’s passing, Diane called the monastery about volunteering. She started out helping with Christmas decorations, then working in the gardens.



But it was in the bakery that she found the place where she belonged, and that’s where she has been a regular volunteer and a familiar face for the past nine years.

And while she works in whatever capacity she’s needed, her specialty is the springerle.

For years, dating back to the 19th century, the Sisters have been baking these special treats, imprinted with holiday images, as part of the German heritage of the area. And no one does springerles like Diane.

She shares in the Sisters’ work in other ways as well. She’s a member of the Women of the Rule, a group of about 100 women who each contribute \$1,000 annually, then meet every fall to hear proposals from the Sisters and vote on projects to fund. (See page 10.)

When she left the religious community in Ferdinand, she took out a life insurance policy naming the Sisters as beneficiaries. That made her a member of the St. Hildegard Society, comprised of donors who have left the Sisters a planned gift.

“Nothing I have is mine,” she says. “I believe in good stewardship, and in sharing my time, talent and treasure.” In doing so, Diane has shown time and again that she is indeed Benedictine through and through.



## FORMER MEMBERS GATHERING

*This fall, on October 9, former members of the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand will return to Monastery Immaculate Conception to gather together with one another and with the Sisters. There may be no truer display of the Benedictine principle of hospitality than that gathering.*

# In Memoriam.

God's promise has been fulfilled for our dear Sisters.

## **Sister Beata Mehling**

**11/9/1927 – 2/24/2022**

The seventh of nine children, Sister Beata earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a Master's degree in Special Education, and had a heart for those who were handicapped or had special needs. She taught primarily special education students for 25 years, and was Principal of Marian Day School for 18 more. She supervised the handicapped residents at Anderson Woods in Siberia, Indiana for 13 years, at Dove House in Jasper for 4, and at Owl House in Jasper for 2 years. In 2021, she celebrated 75 years as a Sister of St. Benedict.



## **Sister Benita Bieber**

**4/10/1917 – 3/30/2022**

Born Margaret Bieber, the second of eight children, Sister Benita passed away just eleven days before her 105th birthday. With two Bachelor's degrees, she taught students for 46 years at St. Mary School, St. Bartholomew School, St. Joseph School, Christ the King, Nativity School, St. Anthony School, St. Benedict School, Fulda Elementary, St. Bernard School, Holy Family School and St. Meinrad Parish. Sister Benita also served as Director of Initial Formation for the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand and in Supportive Services at Monastery Immaculate Conception in areas including Sacristan, Bakery, Vestment Department, Infirmary Dining Room and Kitchen.



## **Sister Norma Fultz**

**11/19/1933 – 7/23/2021**

An only child, Sister Norma held a Bachelor's degree and *three* Master's degrees — in Instructional Systems and Library Science (with a minor in English), in Theology and in English. She taught at Academy Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand and Mater Dei High School in Evansville, and served as Librarian and instructor at Southern Illinois University and Ball State University. After time away caring for her ailing mother, she served as a part time secretary and assistant administrator at Marian Heights Academy; as a chauffeur, archives assistant and secretary to Hispanic Ministries at Monastery Immaculate Conception; as Archivist and Librarian for the Pontifical North American College in Rome, Italy; and as assistant to the President of the Federation of St. Gertrude.





# Juggling Act.

The Multitasking Sister Michelle Sinkhorn.

Most of the Sisters in Ferdinand have become expert multi-taskers, juggling a variety of responsibilities and making it look easy. A great example is the pride of Floyds Knobs, Indiana, Sister Michelle Sinkhorn.

Her primary role at the moment is Project Director and Technology Administrator for Wisdom Connections, Timeless Traditions - Technological Times. In this capacity, she provides an online education resource for Benedictine communities in ten different countries around the world, recording and editing videos, updating the website and providing tech support for a number of religious communities.

Sister Michelle also serves as Assistant to the IT Director here at the monastery in Ferdinand. The position has stretched her in many ways, but also helped her discover that she has an intuitive gift for technology.

She also volunteers much of her time in the Immigration Office at the monastery, where she is accredited by the Department of State to assist Sister Joan Scheller, helping young Latino immigrants as they work toward citizenship, which she finds incredibly rewarding.

Then there's Rome. She'll be traveling there in September to run a hybrid live / Zoom event for CIB, an international organization for Benedictine women. In four languages. How's that for a juggling act?

## A TIMELINE OF THE SISTERS OF ST. BENEDICT OF FERDINAND...

Founded by St. Walburga's Monastery of Bavaria, Eichstadt, Germany, St. Joseph's Convent in St. Marys, PA becomes the first community of Benedictine Sisters in the U.S.

1852

St. Walburga's Convent is founded in Covington, KY.

1859

The Sisters open a boarding school for girls.

1870

The community elects Mother Agatha Werb, who serves until 1890.

1878

The original quadrangle, which is still in use today, is completed and serves as living quarters for the community of 33 members. There is no electricity.

1886

The community elects Mother Veronica Ackerman, who serves until 1902.

1898

St. Benedict's Convent is founded in Erie, PA.

1856

Four Benedictine Sisters arrive in Ferdinand from Covington, KY on August 20. Their first convent is a small frame building near the present St. Ferdinand Church.

1867

The community in Ferdinand elects Mother Benedicta Berns as its first Prioress. She serves until 1878.

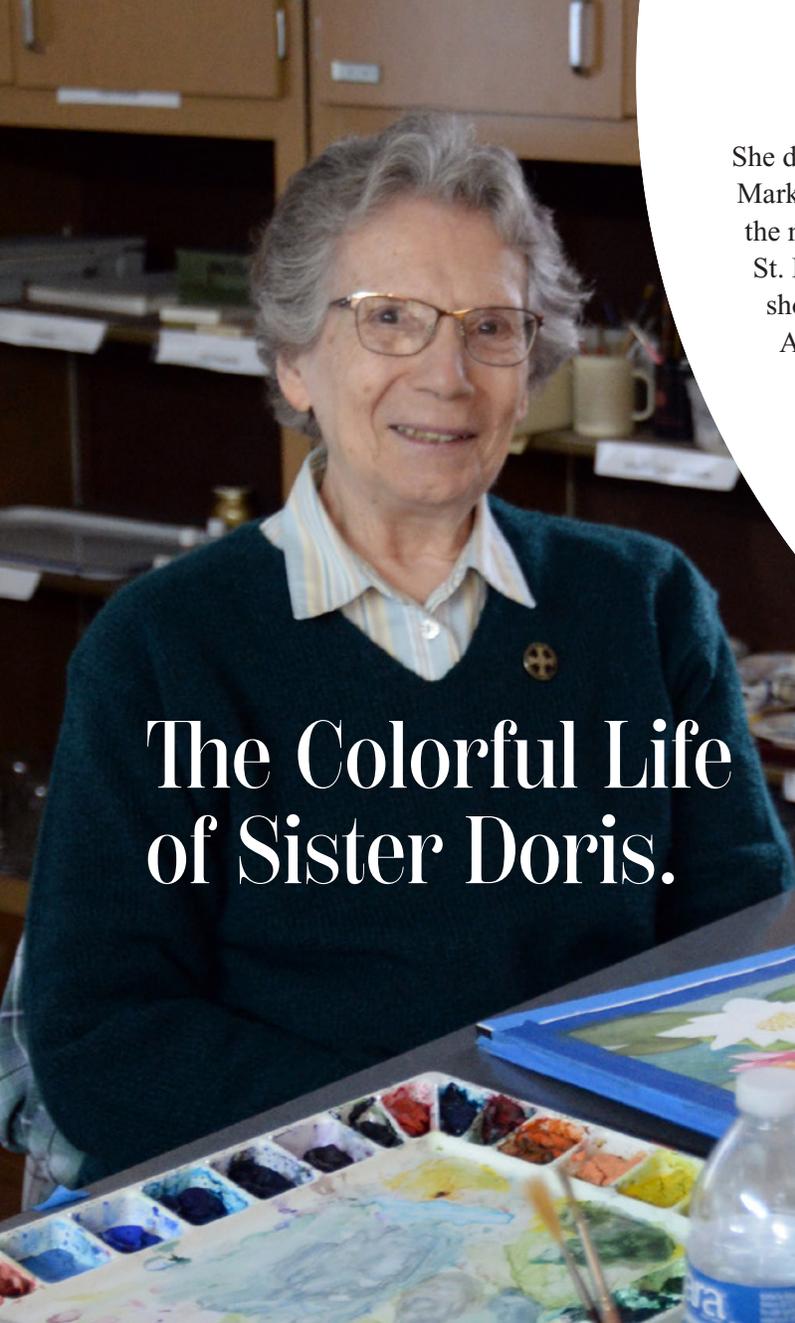
1876

The first daughter house, St. Scholastica's Convent in Shoal Creek, AR, becomes independent. It later moves to Fort Smith.

1879

The community elects Mother Scholastica Stockman, who serves until 1898, and then again from 1902 to 1914.

1890



# The Colorful Life of Sister Doris.

She doesn't remember where it started, but Sister Doris Market has always loved art. She spent her early years at the monastery teaching, then transferred to the Sisters of St. Benedict's dependent monastery in California. What should have been a three-year stay turned into 42 years. As she taught and worked in parishes, she took art classes one night a week — ceramics, stained glass, drawing, sculpture (her first love), pastels and watercolors. She loved California's colors, and when she captures the natural world in her art, she feels a deep sense of purpose. "Art is a way that I can share God's beauty with other people," she says. You can share it as well when you purchase prints or notecards of Sister Doris' beautiful works in our Gift Shop or online.



1902 A telephone and electric lights are installed.

1910 Following the decree of Pope Pius X, the Sisters are permitted to receive daily communion.

1912 The Academy Immaculate Conception is commissioned as a state accredited high school.

1914 St. Benedict College, a two-year Normal (teacher training) School founded by the Sisters, is granted accreditation.

1915 Groundbreaking for the monastery chapel and laying of the cornerstone.

1916 Exterior of church is completed. Construction is halted due to World War I until 1922.

1923 Twelve young women from Germany become members of the community at Ferdinand. They come to the U.S. at the request of their parish priest, a Brother at St. Meinrad.

1924 The vision of Mother Seraphine Kordes is realized when the chapel, known as the "Castle on the Hill," is completed and dedicated by Bishop Joseph Chartrand.

1925 Academy Immaculate Conception Alumnae Association is founded by Sister Hilda.

1926 The Bishop directs the Sisters to use English rather than German for spiritual reading, table reading and prayers being added to the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin.

The community elects Mother Seraphine Kordes, who serves until 1949.

Crypt church is used for monastery liturgies.



# Experience Benedictine Hospitality.



Finding time to spend with God is always a challenge. The Benedictine Hospitality Center at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand was created to solve that dilemma, providing a comfortable place to get away from daily life and devote some quiet time to your spiritual side.

Rooms are available overnight or for multiple nights, with opportunities to join the Sisters for prayer times and Mass if you choose. Dining options are available, too, and you have access to the monastery grounds, the church and courtyard. Rooms are more readily available from Tuesday through Thursday; weekends are often booked.

You can find out more and reserve a room for your own private retreat at [www.thedome.org](http://www.thedome.org) or email [hospitality@thedome.org](mailto:hospitality@thedome.org) to learn more.

## Upcoming Retreats

*The Sisters have two directed retreats coming up in the months ahead. "Seek God in Silence" will take place under the direction of Sister Betty Drewes from Monday evening, August 15 through Friday morning, August 19. And Sister Betty will be joined by Sister Karen Joseph to lead a Silent Directed Retreat from Monday evening, September 9 through Friday morning, September 16. Register at [thedome.org](http://thedome.org).*

The second daughter house, Our Lady of Grace Convent in Beech Grove, IN, becomes independent. Over 100 Sisters from Ferdinand are Our Lady of Grace founding members.

The third daughter house, Queen of Peace Convent in Belcourt, ND, becomes independent.

Pope John XXIII asks U.S. religious communities to send 10% of their members to Central and South America within 10 years. The Ferdinand Benedictines send 3 Sisters to Bogota, Colombia and 6 Sisters to Coban, Guatemala (1978) and Morropon, Peru (1982).

The art studio, converted from the calf barn, is completed.

The Sisters begin to wear a "modified garb" during the summer of 1968.

Madonna Hall, the Academy's residence hall, is completed.

St. Benedict College closes.

The community elects Mother Julia Goebel, who serves until 1973.

1961

1963

1965

1968

1970

1962

1964

1967

1969

1972

Pope John XXIII convenes an Ecumenical Council, which later becomes known as the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II. His call for "aggiornamento" (renewal and adaptation) ushers in sweeping changes for religious communities, including the Ferdinand Benedictines.

Benet Hall is completed.

The Sisters celebrate their 100th anniversary.

The Sisters receive permission to return to their Baptismal names if desired.

Profession of vows as a class is discontinued in favor of individual readiness.

Holy Spirit Monastery in Grand Terrace, CA, founded by the Ferdinand Benedictines, becomes independent.

# The Faces of Need.

## How the Sisters' Humanitarian Fund is Helping.

The Sisters of St. Benedict maintain a Humanitarian Fund to help people in critical moments of need. Here are just a few of the people they've helped in crisis situations in recent months.

Money goes to the Sisters' Blessing Cabinet, where employees may get food for themselves, their families or neighbors in need. When a local food bank runs out, the Blessing Cabinet assists.

Funds were used to rent a U-Haul to take furniture, bedding, dishes, personal hygiene items and winter clothes to Catholic Charities in Louisville to help our Afghan neighbors.

A woman escaped with her four children from an abusive situation. The Sisters helped them get food and a more permanent place to live.

Money was used to buy food for a woman living out of her car. The Sisters gave her a place to stay and found her employment.

Money was sent to buy clothes and food for a family of four who lost everything in a fire.

A young, pregnant victim of domestic violence, a former foster child, had a job at Walmart but lived in an apartment in an unsafe neighborhood with no furniture and a shared bathroom. She spent wisely, but after expenses had only \$15 a month left for food. After a potentially life-threatening situation, her former CASA gave her a place to live and the Sisters provided baby supplies, clothing for mom and baby, and food. She had her baby girl and they have moved into a safe location where we took her more supplies and fresh food. \*

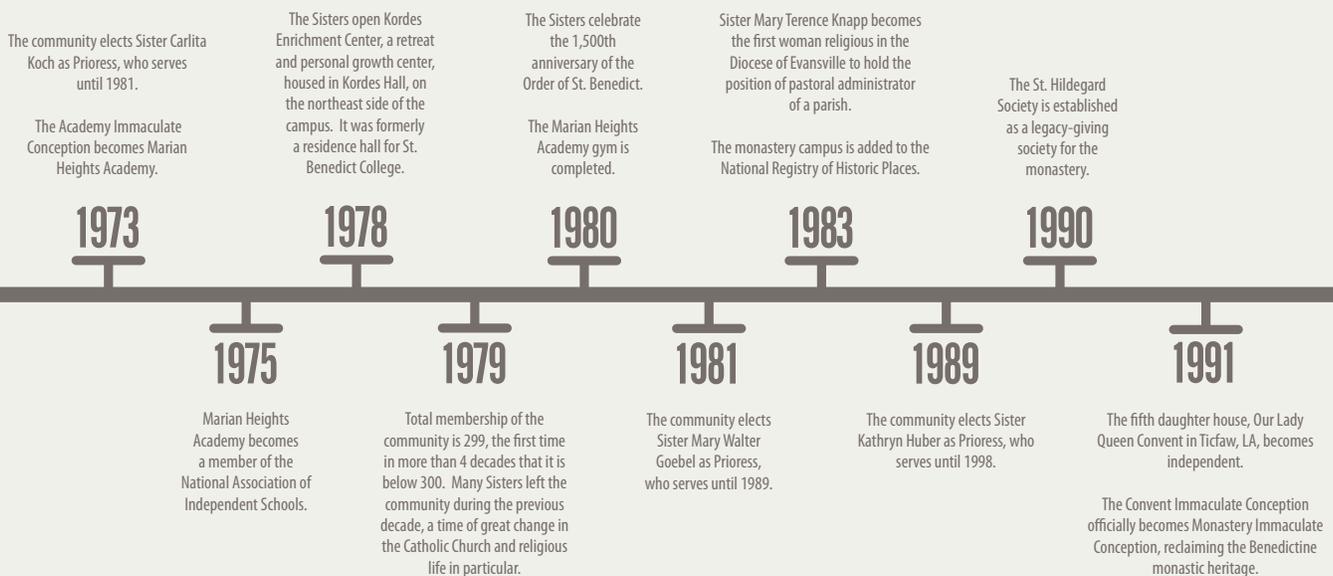
Two children in placement since age 2 months and 14 months (due to domestic violence, neglect and their parents' drug use) were able to return to life with their mother. Three months later, she and her full-term infant died in childbirth. The children were placed in care of their 21-year-old aunt with two children of her own. The Sisters were able to purchase groceries for this family. \*

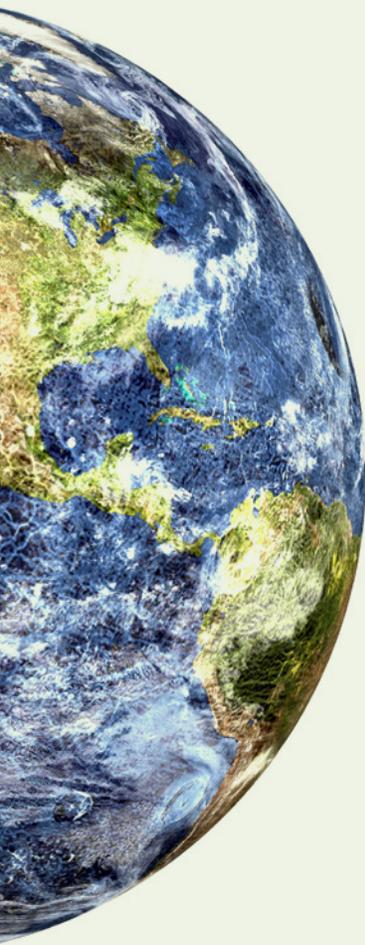


\* Through TTR Haven Over the Hilltop, Inc.

### JOIN US

When you support the Sisters of St. Benedict with a donation, you not only support our ministries, but allow us to meet critical needs like these as they arise.





# Our Common Home.

Sisters of St. Benedict Commit to Vatican's Laudato Si' Action Platform.

In April, the Sisters announced their commitment to join the worldwide Catholic community in responding to Pope Francis' appeal to participate in a seven-year journey toward sustainability and integral ecology by developing a Laudato Si' Action Platform.

This commitment marks the Sisters' willingness to engage the Laudato Si' Goals:

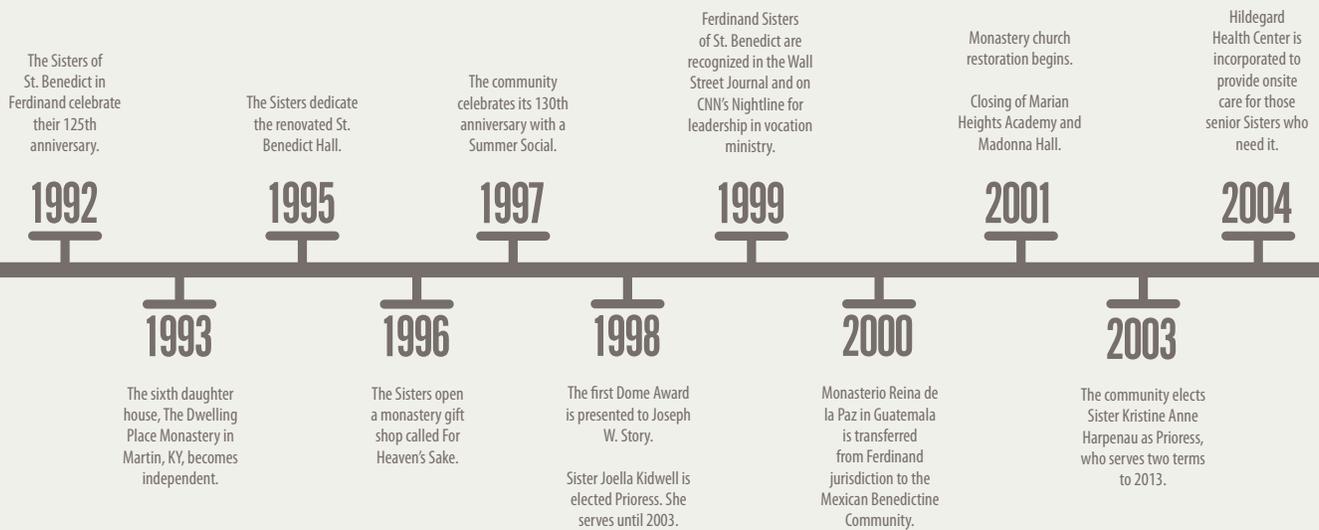
- To care for our common home
- To respond to the cry of the poor
- To engage in ecological economics
- To practice ecological spirituality
- To participate in ecological education
- To adopt more sustainable lifestyles
- To support community resilience and participatory action

"This commitment is made in faith, hope, and love," said Sister Jean Marie Ballard, OSB, chair of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, "knowing that we are participating in God's work of transformation, 'for we know that things can change' (LS 13)."

On Wednesday, May 25, Sister Jean Marie facilitated an event at the monastery in Ferdinand to form Laudato Si' Circles, small groups that gather monthly to deepen their relationship with God as Creator and with all members of creation. Laudato Si' Circles pray with and for creation, reflect on their ongoing ecological conversion and take action.

## All Cooped Up.

The Sisters' new chickens now reside in the Taj Mahal of chicken coops, courtesy of a group of generous volunteers / donors. Sister Teresa Gunter would like to share her undying appreciation. And eggs.



# Discernment Update.

The latest from our Director of Vocations on 2 kinds of discernment.

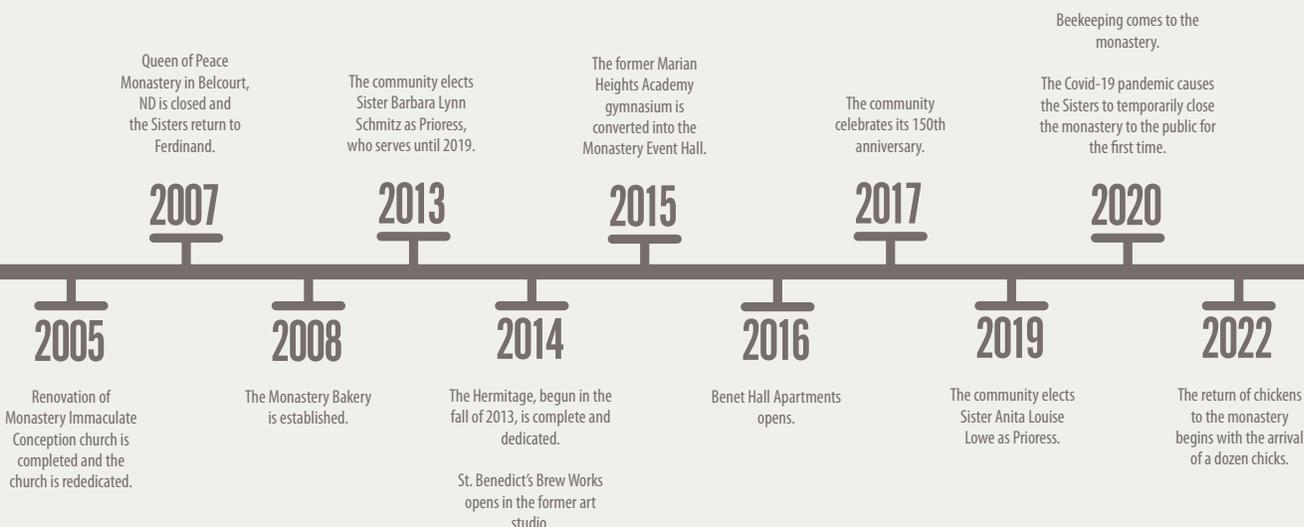
Ever wonder where new Sisters of St. Benedict come from? It involves a lengthy process of discernment for young women who are feeling called to religious life. That currently happens under the gentle direction of Sister Jill Reuber, Director of Vocations for the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand. While Sister Jill is talking with a number of young women at any given time, here's an update on two in particular, plus a recent gathering.

“We have two women discerning with us at the moment who have been walking with us for two years now. Their journeys began with conversations with Sisters, and now they meet regularly with the Vocation Director. They join us for group Lectio, a book study, and continue to listen to where God is calling them. They live and work in Texas and Wisconsin. Please pray for them as they discern.

Recently, 11 Sisters under the age of 55 from our monastery joined Benedictines from around the country for courageous conversations about what the future might hold. We were assigned groups of 4 to 5 from different communities who we'll continue to meet with for the next two gatherings. We'll also visit with our groups via Zoom between meetings. We talked about how we can continue our Benedictine way of life, and how we can share it with others. This is the beginning of a three-year process of meeting, talking and learning from each other.”



*Sister Jill Reuber is Director of Vocations for the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand.*





JESUS COMFORTS THE WOMEN

VII