

Partnering with volunteers and youth



Several of the articles in this issue show how we interact with so many delightful young people – whether it's in the classroom or the many volunteers or camp-goers who enrich our lives at the monastery every summer.

The vitality and spirit of these youth help keep us young, but the relationship runs much deeper than that. It's the beginning of a journey together that we hope lasts a lifetime, because there are far-reaching benefits for all involved. We are energized by the fresh perspective and new ideas of the next generation. And we're told the lessons we share with young people that we learned from life experiences are much appreciated.

As you'll notice, there are various avenues for this sharing and growth, including some you may not expect. Like seeing pictures of Sister Susan Ann Necas move right along with elementary school children as they enjoy her classroom musical activities. Or hearing how 30 volunteer teenagers share their daily God Moments with each other and adults.

You can also read updates on our growing sales of cookies and gift shop items, meet our newest member, Postulant Roxanne Higgins, and learn about the doctorates and honors some of our talented sisters have earned.

In addition, I want you to know we continue to do all we can to become more efficient and to right size our buildings. Our sisters are now mowing grass, washing cars, and working on the grounds more than ever. Benet Hall is on track to re-open as affordable senior housing, helping both us and the local area. And you can read about how we made the tough decision to deconstruct Madonna Hall.

As always, we're looking to the future as we strategically plan our facilities and ministries. With your continued support, and our joint trust in God, we will persevere.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sr. Barbara Lynn Schmitz, OSB".

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, OSB
Prioress

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Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

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Mission: We, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, are monastic women seeking God through the Benedictine tradition of community life, prayer, hospitality, and service to others. By our life and work, we commit ourselves to be a presence of peace as we join our sisters and brothers in the common search for God.



Sister and students make music together

by Greg Eckerle

Sister Susan Ann Necas wants her students to know their lives are important.

As the music teacher for about 500 students at Holy Trinity Catholic School in Jasper, Indiana, she has the formula to make it happen.

"I believe that God gave them all their talents, at different levels," she says. "And what they have we use. Nobody gets left out. Ever."

Sister Susan Ann tries hard to call on every child by name in every class. She looks for ways to praise and motivate them.

Terri Petry, the mother of sixth-grader Sophie, says, "Sister Susan Ann goes above and beyond to make every student there feel special, like they are her particular favorite student. She inspires them, or challenges them if she needs to, she just knows what each kid needs."

Terri's daughter was struggling a couple years ago. She became sick from stage fright before the school's Christmas program. Sister Susan Ann became involved, invited Sophie to sing in the choir, and slowly helped build her self-confidence. Last year, Sophie landed the role of Mary in the program. Terri said it was "really neat to witness" Sister Susan Ann building Sophie up to be "the best she

can be." Terri later sent a note to Sister Susan Ann thanking her "for helping Sophie to believe in herself."

Such an ability to help others as a teacher may have been why Sister Susan Ann experienced a transformative moment herself four years ago, when she had retired from teaching music, but was agonizing over what she could do next. She tried to land bookkeeping work, but nothing opened up. She distinctly recalls her despair in her room one June morning at 5:30 a.m., praying, "God, I'm not trained for anything." She then remembers, as her voice quivers, "I literally felt like I heard God say, 'You are a teacher.' It was a powerful moment for me, and such a powerful moment in prayer." She knew there was an opening for a music teacher in Jasper, so she immediately pursued it and landed the job. "That was totally God's grace. It's one of the highlights of my life."

Above: Sister Susan Ann Necas (far right) leads Holy Trinity Catholic School students in singing the "Jesus, I love you (I serve you; I praise you)" song during Mass at Precious Blood Church in Jasper, Indiana.

Sister Susan Ann Necas and her kindergarten class laugh as they miss-time their jumps while listening and attempting to follow the lively “Seven Jumps” song’s instructions.

It’s apparent her music classes are a highlight for many students, too, judging from their smiles and shrieks of laughter as Sister Susan Ann leads them through a variety of musical activities.

Visits to some of her kindergarten, third, fourth, and fifth grade classes revealed a mix of lesson styles, singing, keyboard playing, dancing, pertinent messages, fun, and the right amount of seriousness. She must employ a variety of approaches, as she teaches every full-day student from pre-school through eighth grade.

One kindergarten class started with a singing version of taking attendance, followed by a joint Hail Mary and a religious song filled with life lessons: “We will love our friends and families, just like Jesus we will care. We will help our friends and family, just like Jesus we will share.” Later, Sister Susan Ann read animatedly from a book as the kids sat nearby, glued to her every word. She even snuck in an anti-bullying message. A song that had everyone acting like penguins had the students up and moving, but afterwards, too much talking led to Sister Susan Ann



taking away their possible good-behavior stickers for the day. The lesson: fun is fine, but having the discipline to listen to the teacher is necessary, too.

Other classes touch on music theory, music composers, music history, instruments, keyboarding, and various music games. Many of the lessons include some religious education, since, as Sister Susan Ann notes, “Christ is the reason we’re here. Talking about God in class just comes naturally. I always carry Christ with me. I think the children sense that.”

But she is also there because of the children.

“These kids mean the world to me. It’s just delightful to be with them. I was called to teach. That’s who I am. I want them to love music, because music is fun and penetrates all of life. And there’s nothing more rewarding than walking down the hall, hearing ‘Sister Susan,’ and a child comes running and throws their arms around you.”

She brings a lot of her Benedictine values into her teaching. “We really love each other, and know we’re family. I teach the kids to treat things as vessels of the altar, according to Benedict’s Rule. So we take care of our books, our keyboards, our pencil sharpeners. We strive to treat each other gently, at the monastery and at



Sister Susan Ann and fourth graders enjoy listening to and playing the game “Apple Tree.”

“The love of Christ shines through her, which is very much attributed to her Benedictine background.”

Holy Trinity School. It's just automatic. I don't have any big thing to offer. I'm just who I am.”

But others think she has plenty to offer as she teaches the joys of music.

Tori Hemmerlein, a fourth-grader, wrote in notes to Sister Susan Ann last year, “You are the best pianist I ever heard and really good at singing, praying, and more. I love you so much I think I might have tears of joy. . . . You inspire me every day. . . . Every time my heart beats I think about you.”

Sandy Hemmerlein, Tori's mother, says, “Tori likes to sing, and Sister Susan Ann has always encouraged all the kids. For Tori, having that encouragement has made her really want to sing. She sang a solo in the school's talent show. I'm sure Sister Susan Ann's encouragement helped build her self-confidence to be able to do that.”

Holy Trinity School's administrators have also taken note of Sister Susan Ann's gifts. Sally Sternberg, the school's former principal who is now assistant superintendent of Evansville

Diocese Catholic schools, remembers the sense of joy and life she had, how she radiated enthusiasm for music in the classroom and in church, and how “the love of Christ shines through her, which is very much attributed to her Benedictine background.”

Current principal Tyler Lemen feels Sister Susan Ann does a great job with ensuring music and singing is a huge part of the students' Mass experience. “She teaches them the importance of music in their lives,” he says. “I enjoy that she does line dancing. It gets them moving, which is a great skill for them. She brings that spiritual aspect to what we do here.”

Last year, each fifth grade student was asked to select their “earthly saint” and describe why they chose them during a school program. Grace Bartley picked Sister Susan Ann, writing, “Saint Cecilia is the patron of musicians. Sister Susan Ann is my earthly saint. These two are alike because they both worship God and their lives are filled with music...Thank you Sister Susan for teaching me music and being there for us. You are the best music teacher anyone could ask for.” ■



Sister Susan Ann belts out “Hurrah! Hurrah!” as her kindergarteners march behind her around the classroom singing “The ants go marching one by one, hurrah! hurrah!”

Cookie, gift shop sales rise



Monastery Baked Goods salesperson Jordan Kleinhelter helps a customer at our cookie booth at the Atlanta trade show in July.

A typical reaction when a customer bites into a monastery-made gourmet cookie at a trade show is a simple “mmmmmm.”

That’s a similar response to recent sales of Monastery Gift Shop items and the cookies. Both are up, with fresh marketing ideas underway to keep the momentum going. It’s all focused on making Monastery Goods & Services a good source of sustainable profit for the sisters for the future.

“We are up over 20% in sales over comparable periods for last year,” says Cyndy Faulkenberg, co-director of Monastery Goods & Services. “That’s a substantial increase for a business, considering normal growth is 2-3%, in keeping up with inflation.”

New products, new customers, and new strategies are helping fuel the sales growth. A cookie booth in July at two large trade shows in Chicago and Atlanta helped land 22 new accounts in about a two-month period.

“There’s considerable interest in our new assortment cookie tin,” says Cyndy. “The Catholic Marketing Show in Chicago was fantastic. We received quite a few orders. They had a workshop encouraging the Catholic Market to add more foods in their stores, and we just happened to be the prime food at that show.

“I think we have a niche with our cookies. For instance, you can walk around the gourmet food sections in the AmericasMart in Atlanta, and there are no cookies like the sisters’ cookies. It appeals to customers that our product supports the mission of the sisters, that their purchase goes back to benefiting society.”

Angi Seffernick, also co-director of Monastery Goods & Services, points out, “There was certainly nothing at the Atlanta show that had the story or sentiment behind it like our cookies with the sisters.” There’s no doubt that cookies prayerfully made by the sisters is an attention-getter.

The cookies were scheduled to be sold at events in Ferdinand, Madison (Indiana), Indianapolis, and Bardstown, Kentucky, in September and October. They will also appear at Christkindmarkt in Ferdinand November 19-20. The next major wholesale show is at Atlanta again in January. Cyndy is targeting growth in the wholesale area. “We want to raise awareness that we have a wholesale operation, that retail shops can get the sisters’ cookies from us to sell in their stores.” Monastery cookies are sold in over 120 stores in 30 states.

Businesses are being contacted about including the sisters’ cookies in their corporate gift programs. A mailing was sent to over 4,300 gourmet and specialty foods stores. E-commerce sites are looking to add the cookies, as online purchasing becomes ever more popular. Several catalog companies carry the cookies in their online and printed consumer catalogs.

“We’re out to cookie the world,” says Cyndy, smiling. “I think our possibilities are endless. The market is so huge and we have barely scratched the surface.”

The Monastery Gift Shop, located in the Monastery Event Hall in Ferdinand, is also enjoying 20% sales growth, with cookies being their top seller. But there are plenty of other hot items, including Benedictine bracelets and necklaces Angi acquired at the Atlanta show. “They are gorgeous, and a perfect fit for us,” says Angi. “We sell a lot of religious, faith-based jewelry. We do well with children’s books and monastery-made items.”

The gift shop regularly adds new items: including tea towels, tumblers, merchandise for the nearby St. Benedict Brew Works (t-shirts, shot glasses, and regular glasses), sacramental gifts, and Sister Joan’s dog treats. There are products made at monasteries throughout the U.S.: Trappist jelly, soaps, lotions, plus the Ferdinand Benedictines’ own spicy pretzels, gluten-free pretzels, and popular handcrafted items made by the sisters, like crocheted hats, artwork, scrubbies, and book beads.

Monthly sales promotions are helping the gift shop, as is a growing emphasis on its online store. The number of items in the online store has more than doubled in the past year. And the gift shop itself has undergone a refreshing facelift.

“Anyone who hasn’t been in the gift shop for a while needs to visit,” says Angi. “We’ve rearranged the layout, opening up space, and have added some nice chairs, if you want to take a break. I like to call them spouse chairs.”

Angi also spearheads regular gift shop e-mails, often including incentives. A popular recent addition is free shipping with a \$50 order. Her email distribution list has grown from 2,000 to 10,000. The gift shop is planning to add new items in time for Christmas. To see the new products and incentives, and to shop online, visit monasterygiftshop.org and monasterybakedgoods.org. ■



Sister Corda connects students with the Lord

by Greg Eckerle

Ask Sister Corda Trouy, in her 56th year of teaching religion education, how long she intends to keep going and she chuckles, "Some people call me the Energizer Bunny. But we stay young here at the monastery, with God's grace."

She also credits the teaching itself with giving her much of the energy, along with the support of her fellow sisters. "I'm not the greatest teacher, but I love teaching," she says. "I try to use the gifts the dear Lord gave me. I'm so grateful; may God be glorified."

"I love working with all the kids. They give me joy, and energy. I enjoy helping the kids learn more about God and making better choices, and learning to be happy with who they are, to encourage them to be the person God made them to be, and using their gifts. When they're struggling, I see that side of me, too, because God's not finished with me yet, either. That helps me be patient with them, because God isn't finished with any of us."

Sister Corda has taught several grade school classes for St. Ferdinand (Indiana) Parish the past 19 years. This year she is teaching third, fifth, and seventh grades.

One of the gifts the Lord gave her is a knack for connecting with students. That much is readily apparent to Father Jack Durcholz and Mickie Paulin, the parish's former director of religious education.

Father Jack points to her Benedictine life as helping spur that connection. "It's a whole different spirituality. And it's just who she is, too. She has a simple, powerful, child-like faith in God. Kids trust that. When you know you're truly loved, that makes the difference. And she truly loves the children."

"She's a real joy. We're so fortunate to have her. She has such joy in her heart, a joy that transcends most people I know, and that reflects to the kids. She brings herself to their level. I see how the kids love her. They know she wants what's best for them. She's just a special lady."

Above: Sister Corda Trouy practices the communion procedure with her second grade religion class as they prepare for their First Communion Day.

Paulin feels that Sister Corda “really is the face of Christ for these kids. She comes at everything from a prayerful angle. She has a way of making each child feel special, and loved. I just love how she approaches life with child-like fun.”

Sister Corda also has a definite approach to building students’ attention: “letting them know that you care about them, then you can teach them something.” Even for the ones that cause trouble. And if some never really listen, she prays for them anyway. And she particularly likes to reach out to the kids having a bad day.

“I affirm them when they do things well. You can always find something to say positive about them. It makes them feel good about themselves.”

One of her philosophies is to reach into the students’ hearts, because then she can engage with their minds. One of her favorite routines for all classes is the “heart room prayer.” She has the children turn their chairs to face the wall, so there are no distractions, and instructs them to “talk to Jesus in your own words.” She suggests a variety of topics to talk about, from school to summer activities to friends to families, and who they could pray for. Parents have mentioned their children appreciate the prayer, and some even use it at home. Sister Corda encourages them to say the prayer anytime, anywhere. She repeatedly tells students that God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Mary are there for them 24/7 – all they have to do is ask. She teaches the children how to have a personal relationship with Jesus, so they can go to God at any time. Her fervent desire is that the students will treasure and keep their faith.

Sister Corda slips in prayers, and hints for the children, throughout her classroom activities –

“Thank you, Lord Jesus, for being with us all this time, 24/7 . . .

“Help that these children will grow closer in love for you and your Blessed Mother every day . . .

“Tell Jesus how much you love him. Ask him to help you know what you want to be when you get older . . .

“Let me see you smile. A smile sets everything straight . . .

“When you say your night prayers tonight, pray for our prayer sponsors. I pray for them every night . . .

“What can we say in our thank you cards to our prayer sponsors? I need some help. You all have a wonderful brain, what can you say to your prayer sponsors?

“Pray for all those you love, and for all the people who don’t know Jesus, that they will get to know Jesus. . .”

If she hears the siren of a nearby ambulance or fire truck, she will ask the students to pray for the people who are working and who are affected by the emergency. Years later, some still remember those compassionate requests. Or her saying that if it’s raining on the outside, you can still have sunshine on the inside.

Noah Lindeman, upon his graduation from Forest Park High School last spring, sent Sister Corda a note thanking her “for guiding me spiritually.” He recalled her caring personality and how she always kept class fun. “She knew how to teach us in ways we could understand. She helped mold our young minds. She knew how to help kids grow spiritually and connect with the Lord.”

Another former student, Amy Metz, said, “Sister Corda kept everyone’s attention by telling stories, and taught how faith was important to her, and why it should be a center point of our lives as well. She always found a way to brighten everyone’s day.” Amy’s sister, Rachel, termed Sister Corda “one of the sweetest people I’ve ever met; she cared a lot about what you had to say.”

Dolores Lueken, who has taught with Sister Corda for years, marvels at the special connection and rapport Sister Corda engineers with students. “When she teaches religion, that is her life, to teach about God. God always comes first. She teaches that to children. She tries to impress children about how they need God in their life.”

Sister Corda takes advantage of every teaching moment, even as children are walking out the door. At the end of a second-grade class last spring, after singing “I’ve got that joy, joy, joy, down in my heart,” she told the students who were leaving, “Boys and girls, have a wonderful week. Get ready for Pentecost.”

A small boy replied, “I am.”

Sister Corda smiled and whispered to him, “God bless you.” ■



Sister Corda admires the project work of a student in her religious education class.



Teen volunteers share God moments

by Greg Eckerle

The view from the monastery colonnade outside the church is inspiring enough, but you ought to be there when 30 teenagers talk about how they experienced God while volunteering for the sisters for four days.

There is one incredible revelation after another. The first is that this group makes about a three-hour trip from southern Illinois every summer to help out the sisters, to mingle with them, to learn from each other, and to deepen their relationship with God. My bet is you won't find many teenagers giving up their vacation time, or their chance to make money at summer jobs, to do such a thing.

Each day during their mission trip, the teenagers and their adult trip coordinators voluntarily work at odd jobs on the monastery grounds, often in sweltering heat, then eat with the sisters, take a silent reflection period called "God Time" to converse with the Lord, enjoy various activities, and cap off the day in a group meeting where each shares what was their "high" (or best part) of the day, their "sigh" (or hard part) of the day, and their "God Moment," or where they discovered God that day.

That group meeting has some of the most sincere, refreshing, honest, uplifting sharing of thoughts that you'll ever hear. It does the younger generation proud. Some examples –

"My high was getting to work with my group."

"My God Moment was every time I stepped into the monastery I just felt the presence of God."

"My sigh is that everybody is leaving tomorrow."

"My God Moment was singing to the sunset, 'Here I am Lord.'"

"My God Moment is God put people in my life to help push away my thought that I'm worthless."

"My God Moment is seeing all the little creatures today while cleaning up tree limbs."

"My high is when a sister gives me a hug and says, 'God bless you.' It just melts my heart. I can't look at them because I will cry."

"My high is seeing us all come together to serve each other and serve the Lord."

"My high is I didn't think I could do that much work."

"My God Moment here is I don't have to try to impress anybody."

"My high was meeting my new sister prayer partner."

"The God Moment for me is always up here on the colonnade."

John and Tena Karcher, a married couple that has coordinated the group's trip for 8 years, also joined in the session, as did some sisters.

John's God Moment is simply listening to the teenagers' God Moments. That's precious to him because it confirms the value of the mission trip. Tena told the group her high is "coming here, praying, working, serving all of you." Her God Moment is seeing Jesus in the teenagers' faces, seeing their smiles and their kindness.

Tena talked about praying during God Time, and that the word God gave her was "seeds." "God was trying to tell me, I think, 'You've been here eight years, seeds have been planted each time, and your faith is growing because of this place and this experience.'"

Above: Teen volunteers from McLeansboro and Milstadt, Illinois, listen to Sister Teresa Gunter (second from left) as they share thoughts on the colonnade outside the monastery church. At left is one of the trip's adult coordinators, Tena Karcher.

The mission trips have turned into something much more than just volunteer work. The adults give talks that provide invaluable advice and self-help for the kids. Videos and slide shows send recurring messages: You are loved; You don't have to prove yourself; Don't try to be somebody else. The sisters will also have in-depth conversations with them during meals and activities. And there's plenty of old-fashioned fun.

"Kids need to have bonding time, and fun, and some quiet time," says Tena. "We feel God Time is very important. We try to give them the seeds they need planted in them to help with their faith walk. Someone else will water them, and God will make them grow." Tena says it's the highlight of her summer to come here with her husband. "We enjoy serving and we enjoy the relationships we've built with the sisters, and we enjoy watching the youth serve. That fills our hearts. It's just part of our lives now. It's easy to feel peace and love at the monastery. We try to take that back with us, and not let the world rob us of that as soon as we get home. Through the sisters, I've made a commitment to pray and work and show hospitality. The sisters have impacted me and my husband's lives, to make us want to be servants. It's more fun to serve somebody else, actually."

Sister Teresa Gunter, director of vocations, addressed the group several times. She talked about the sisters' new tagline of "The world was zigging; I zagged," which refers to the sisters entering the community because they wanted something different. She told the teenagers, "It takes a strong person to give up summer vacation -- I know you have jobs -- to help the sisters by mulching and dragging tree limbs. What you did for me and my sisters, that's a huge zag. My 'sigh' is I'm going to miss you saying 'I love God.' So make that God Time before you get out of bed, or in the shower, or driving to school. That God Time is available to you. You're never too busy for that."



Sister Teresa Gunter (middle) leads the volunteer youth group in prayer. They had just burned a paper bag that contained notes the kids had written describing problems they were struggling with. Sister Teresa said, "Loving God, we have so many struggles . . . if you just take it and you burn it and get rid of it . . . here we are, God, just asking that you be part of our lives . . . give us strength for this journey . . ."



Illinois teen volunteers enjoy hearing the comments during their nightly "God Moments" session at the monastery.

Sister Doris Schepers told the group, "I look forward every summer to working with you all, because you come here of your own free will. You gave up whatever you could have done this week. You came here to help us. Seeing you do that gives me hope for the future. My God Moment is seeing you all take that time to be with God when you're here. I hope you carry that back with you."

For Sister Mary Philip Berger, volunteer director, her "high" was how all the youths "add a definite spark to our community. The sisters look forward to it every year."

Before departing for home, two McLeansboro, Illinois, teenagers shared why they keep returning to the monastery.

Emily Blades, on her fourth mission trip, said she came the first time to strengthen her faith. She said it "absolutely" worked, and that's why she keeps coming back. "It's such a wonderful experience. Seeing the sisters in prayer, and how happy and devoted they are to giving their lives to God, is very impactful to me. My grandma is very religious, and I see her in the sisters. That's God to me.

"I love experiencing peace here. I can't really do that anywhere else but here. Here I can breathe and chill, and be more devoted to God. I need to be authentic, and do more to please the Lord. I know I am forgiven, that everyone makes mistakes, because the sisters make mistakes, and they talk about it at lunch. It just makes me feel better about myself. It's reassuring when I come here. Four years ago, I doubted God. My grandma got very sick. I put him aside. But when I came here, it just really opened my eyes. The sisters are inspiring. It's just heartwarming here."

Jayci Reyling, on her third trip, said, "Just helping any way I can is amazing. I love to get closer to God and strengthen my faith. My God Moment is just seeing how loved I am by the sisters, and appreciated. You can definitely feel it here. Bringing things back with me from here, and reminding myself every day, just tops it off." ■



Staying with the sisters

By Tory Lanaghan

(Editor's Note: Last summer, five young women volunteered to participate in a "Service to Sisterhood" two-month program at the monastery. It was designed for them to learn about the sisters and to become ambassadors for the community. One of the women, Tory Lanaghan of Millstadt, Illinois, is a junior at Murray State University, majoring in public relations and creative writing. She wrote several blogs about her experiences that appear on the sisters' website, thedome.org. Reprinted here is a condensed version of her blogs. Also participating in the program were Tory's sister, Shea; Kelsey Spindler from Haubstadt, Indiana; Emily Earhart from Evansville, Indiana; and Clair Slusser from New Albany, Indiana.)

The night before I left home in early June, I looked into my mirror and asked God for something that would make me feel at peace with my conflicted state of mind. I wanted a Catholic community without the restraints on who was welcome to God. I wanted to be able to change lives as a woman in the Church. I wanted a home that would challenge my thoughts and provoke me into being the best I could be. Even as I asked for it, I didn't believe a place like that existed.

The first couple weeks, God loosened me up with daily prayer and small jobs around the monastery, letting me see the constant love that the sisters had for each other and how it grew to include our little community of five. I worked for them as I had for years

during short mission trips, but the many days together revealed the fiery souls and the humble greatness that lurked beneath each Benedictine woman.

I was able to tag along with Sister Christine Marie Fendel, who gives communion and does a rosary with the residents in Ferdinand's nursing home. It was here I first began to realize the impact these sisters have. I saw men and women who couldn't walk, speak, or even move light up when we entered the room to pray over them. I could see they craved the simplicity that the prayers brought.

The sisters work together, laugh together, cry together, and pray together. They are brought together through God.

In week two at Camp Marian (for middle school girls) there was excitement and bonding, all fueled from Sisters Teresa Gunter and Jill Reuber, who led us all in crazy games and humble prayer. They taught the girls the importance of love and cooperation through each rotation of games and activities. They showed us how to make a

Above: The five volunteers in last summer's "Service to Sisterhood" experience enjoy a stroll down a Peru street. In back, from left to right, are Kelsey Spindler, Clair Slusser, and Tory Lanaghan. In front are Emily Earhart and Shea Lanaghan.

difference. I began to see how the sisters brought the Benedictine way into their lives.

These sisters party as much as they work, and they work a lot. Through it all, they uphold their Benedictine tradition of love and good zeal, so they can show others what a great time loving God can be. That is how they are changing their corner of the world.

By the time the first mission trip showed up on week three, my soul's eyes were narrowed as I listened to the talks on finding the love Jesus showed us when we were on earth. I became curious about the beliefs of these sisters.

That's when God shoved me through the mirror I stared into. Over the course of a single week, I fell in love with a community, panicked, tried to run away, and was promptly pulled right back into it. Piece by piece, God took every reason that I didn't want to be with the Sisters of St. Benedict and crushed them before my eyes.

Later, Prioress Barbara Lynn Schmitz spoke of a woman's work in the Church, how it is needed, and how the Church is changing for the better. She said that all of this is part of Benedict's Rule: we should love others like Jesus loved; all are equal before God; everyone is needed when you are part of the community of Christ.

So, there is a place that loves like I believed Jesus wants us to? I've found a community of strong willed women that accept any human beyond their sins? I was beyond excited. I was ecstatic. I was over the moon. I couldn't get The Rule out of my mind. I had it bad for God and it wasn't going away.

We visited sisters' missions in Evansville and Louisville to see the work that they did there. They created schools, homeless shelters, and safe houses for women from scratch just because they saw a people in need and needed to take care of them. I heard stories of sisters who traveled miles across the country and across the world to serve people into loving Christ as they saw Him.

We shared the sisters' meals, their prayers, and their free time. I realized these women were fun-loving, ice-cream-craving, belly-laughing, ordinary people that prayed, ate, and worked as one. When I saw the sisters in action, I began to see how God had changed them to think and do differently.

On week eight, we left for Peru and I realized I wanted nothing more than to be the woman who changed people's lives for the better and loved with a passion that could not be directed to any one person. As we got on the plane, I made a promise to myself and to God. I would do that. I would work for others every day and give every part of myself to God, because that was what he wanted from me.

The day we returned to Ferdinand, I cried at evening prayer. I had less than 24 hours before I would be in a world where there weren't people who wanted to serve each other for the sake of serving God. The girls, my sisters, crowded around to give me comfort before I had to go home and pack all of my things so they could be moved to a place that I did not want to be.

I remember when a pair of hands cupped my cheeks and I went readily into Sister Teresa's arms. She shushed me like a child and said, "I know it hurts. But it only hurts because you love so deeply."

The opening of the Rule of Benedict says, "Listen carefully, my child, to my instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from one who loves you; welcome it faithfully and put it into practice."

If I had not listened for God, I never would have come to Ferdinand, I never would have known these Sisters of St. Benedict, and I never would have found the home in them. If I had not listened to the advice of the One who loves me, I would be stuck in a rotation of meaningless life choices centered on myself, never having the opportunity to change the world for the better.

With the Rule, Benedict arms us with the strength "to do battle for Jesus, the Christ." Joan Chittister says that this means we are called to something greater, beyond ourselves. I need that. I need to be a part of this thing that pushes me beyond my limits. I am only half of a person without it.

I didn't want to go to Ferdinand for the summer, but had I gone to get a ordinary job so I could be with my ordinary friends, God would not have given me the option of being extraordinary. Had I kept zigging with the rest of the world, I never would have known that I could zag.

Now, at school, I make time for prayer and read the Rule before I go to bed, just so I can talk to God more regularly. I am not perfect, but I know that I am trying for God, because I know He's into me. And because I stayed with the sisters, I'm pretty into Him, too. ■



Posing on a couch while visiting the sisters' monastery in Peru are, in back from left to right, Clair Slusser, Emily Earhart, Shea Lanaghan, and Tory Lanaghan. In front is Kelsey Spindler.

Go make a difference: Camp Marian 2016

by Sister Briana Elisabeth Craddock, OSB

Cheers extolling the virtues of five Benedictine saints echoed across the monastery campus as middle school girls, counselors, adult volunteers, and sisters gathered at Madonna Lake for Camp Marian.



Campers, led by Service to Sisterhood participant, Shea Lanaghan (second from right), practice the cheer for their small group.

The camp, which has been held each summer for the past 15 years, is open to girls who have just completed fifth through eighth grade. This year, girls from Indiana, Kentucky, and Illinois participated in the two-day experience, which began on June 13. Upon arrival, the girls were divided into five groups, named after five Benedictine saints: Benedict, Scholastica, Hildegard, Gertrude, and Walburga. Campers learned about the patron saint of their small group and composed cheers that they later shouted as they moved from activity to activity around Madonna Lake.

The small groups of campers, led by counselors and adult volunteers, rotated through activities led by sisters, including archery, team-building games, arts and crafts, free play, and prayer. Campers also went swimming in the monastery's pool, sang songs and roasted marshmallows around a campfire, and enjoyed meals prepared by Sister Judy Dewig and Sister Doris Schepers.

The theme of this year's camp was "Go make a difference." Throughout the experience, campers learned ways they could

make a difference in the world, even in small choices such as not wasting food or paper plates. Sister Teresa Gunter, one of the vocation directors for the Sisters of St. Benedict, shared that the theme was chosen because "with the Pope's message of mercy, it is important for the young to know that they can make a difference in their homes, schools, parishes, and in the world."

Campers, counselors, and sisters agreed that Camp Marian was a good experience. Camper Jessi Irvin stated that she liked being able to go to Camp Marian. "It's fun. I get to meet new people and hang out with everybody. My mom wishes that she had something like this to do when she was my age." Camper Anabel Moore concurred. "It's really fun here," she said. "The food is delicious. It is the only time I get to sleep in a tent because we don't go camping. The sisters are really fun. We play lots of games. I always like meeting new people."

Counselor Mary Grace Alvey attended camp for four years, and has been a counselor for the past three years. Alvey stated that camp is fun and that she enjoys being a counselor. "I enjoy the sisters," she said.

"I feel like they try to include everyone and I like that. I like being able to pray with the sisters."

Emily Earhart, an adult volunteer and participant in the Service to Sisterhood project, stated that she enjoyed being with the campers and listening to them share on a deep level. "It was exciting to see how well they interacted. They were willing to learn and get new understanding. They were so enthusiastic."

Sister Jill Reuber, director of Camp Marian, has worked every camp since 2003 and is passionate about this ministry. "I love working with the campers and counselors and seeing them come back each year. I keep returning because I have a passion for sharing our life and who we are as Ferdinand Benedictines. This may be the only time the campers get to meet or know a sister. I hope the campers see that it's okay to share their faith and that they don't have to hide it."

Plans for Camp Marian 2017, which will be held from June 12-14, are already well underway. Girls who have just completed fifth through eighth grade are encouraged to attend so that they can meet the sisters, learn more about Jesus and the Benedictine saints, eat s'mores, and have fun. ■

Reflecting on New Wineskins: A Gathering of Benedictine Women 55 and Under

by Sister Briana Elisabeth Craddock, OSB

Let me just say this up front: I am not a fan of meetings, especially those that require sitting and listening within a large group for days on end. Despite my general antipathy towards group conferences, I found myself looking forward to the Benedictine 55 and under gathering that was held at Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, Indiana, in April.

At that time, I was the third youngest person and the youngest perpetually professed sister living on the hill. Because of that, I was eagerly anticipating some time to tap into the energy and vitality of other young members in Benedictine communities throughout the United States and to gain new information and new perspectives to bring back with me.

Approximately 80 Benedictines under 55 who had made first profession attended the three-day workshop. It was a time of meetings and input, but also a time of sharing, prayer, and fun.

The weekend focused on new wineskins as described in the Gospel of Luke: "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skin and be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new wine but says, 'The old is good.'"

As Benedictines, we are confronted with the balance between the old and the new, between tradition and progress. At the core of Benedictine life today is the old wine of prayer, work, and community that harkens back to the time of Saint Benedict. Through time, in

favorable and in unfavorable conditions, prayer, work, and community life have remained the cornerstones of the Benedictine way of life.

Just as our foremothers came to Ferdinand to begin a new monastery while maintaining traditions established in previous centuries, we have faced changes and challenges that have led us to build upon our traditions to establish something new. As we move forward, we must maintain the delicate balance between knowing what to keep and what to discard or update.

One way that U.S. Benedictine communities have been building upon the tradition established by our Benedictine ancestors is through Wisdom Connections: Timeless Tradition Technological Times (T4) program. It gathers the wisdom of Benedictine sisters and brothers so it can be shared with all Benedictines and uses technology to allow newer members to get to know one another. The core team members focus their energies to develop content, build relationships, and provide the necessary technology for the project. Sisters throughout the country are able to watch videos recorded at various locations and then share with other sisters in their assigned groups in real time via Zoom Cloud Meetings. There are 95 videos covering 21 topics, given by 16 different presenters. Forty-nine sisters are in nine groups.

We are also working to collaborate with one another among communities and federations. This is especially essential now since the demographics within U.S. communities have changed. Prior to the late 1960's, the number of women entering each year numbered

ten or more. Vatican II reforms coupled with the emerging role of women in the workplace led to a decrease in the number of women entering religious communities. While previous generations had numerous resources within the community from which to draw, many Benedictine communities now find that they cannot accomplish things on their own. The New Wineskins gathering and technologically-assisted meetings have allowed bonds to develop among members of U.S. Benedictine communities. Through the creation of this new wine, the old wine is being preserved.

As Benedictines under 55, we are called to carry on the tradition of those who have been in community much longer than us and to look ahead to the manifestation of future Benedictine life.

While we remain rooted in community life, prayer, and work, we know that we must work together among communities and federations to keep Benedictine life vital and thriving. ■



New Wineskins participants from Ferdinand community. Front row left to right: Sisters Catherine Marie Duenne, Anita Louise Lowe, Kathy Cash, Federation President Joella Kidwell, Michelle Sinkhorn, Sarah Cathleen Yungwirth, Teresa Gunter. Second Row: Briana Elisabeth Craddock, Jeana Visel, Jill Reuber, Rachel Lynn Geracitano, Gail Hamilton, Doris Schepers, Traci Stutz, Paula Wolff

NEWSfrom the Dome

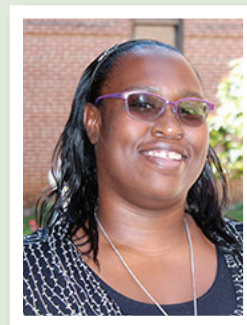
Ferdinand sisters welcome new member

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, have officially accepted Roxanne Higgins into the postulancy, which is the first stage of incorporation into the religious community.

Postulant Roxanne, who is from Kingston, Jamaica, is the 33-year-old daughter of Webster and Marcia Higgins. She is the third of four children and a member of Stella Maris Roman Catholic Church in Jamaica. She has a Bachelor of Science degree with honors in Chemistry (Special) and a Master of Philosophy degree in Chemistry. Prior to coming to Ferdinand, Postulant Roxanne was the production operations manager at Smith & Stewart Distributors Ltd., a company that manufactures ice cream in Jamaica.

Postulant Roxanne is now taking classes in Liturgy of the Hours and Catholicism. She will be working in the bakery and assisting with various services around the monastery.

Postulant Roxanne says, "It is difficult to explain why I'm entering community and specifically this community. It is and has always been my desire to live the life God planned for me. My desire is His desire. I believe God sent me to Ferdinand. Being a natural recluse, the ease at which I connected with a group of strangers on a one week visit and the feeling as if I left a part of my heart here after such a short visit could have only been a blessing from God. The sequence of events over the next year as I continued to discern with Sister Teresa Gunter led me to believe that the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand is where I am meant to be right now."



Sisters open their 150th year

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, will mark the 150th anniversary of their founding in Ferdinand on August 20, 2017. A year of celebration was kicked off Saturday, August 20, 2016, with fellow religious women and Bishop Charles Thompson.

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress, says, "As we reflect on the gifts of the past 150 years and look forward to our future with hope, we do so with gratitude to God. We are also grateful for our family, friends, and supporters that have championed us."

During the year of celebration, the sisters will privately join with various groups, such as their families, Oblates, and donor organizations to celebrate. Monastery Gift Shop will celebrate its 20th anniversary plus the sisters' 150th anniversary on October 22. The public is invited as the sisters host a concert of area school and parish choirs in the monastery church on December 4, 2016.



The celebration will culminate and everyone is invited to the monastery for the Sisters' Summer Social June 2-3, 2017.

More information on the history of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, can be found at thedome.org. Future information on events will also be posted on thedome.org.



Sisters celebrate jubilees

Sister Jennifer Miller, Sister Joyce Marie Newton, and Sister Marilyn Schroering celebrated their 50th anniversary of profession at the monastery on Saturday, June 18, 2016. The golden jubilee sisters entered the monastery in 1964 and made their monastic vows in 1966.

Left: (L to R) Sister Marilyn Schroering, Sister Joyce Marie Newton, and Sister Jennifer Miller celebrated their golden jubilee in June.

Madonna Hall's future

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand will deconstruct Madonna Hall, which has been vacant since 2000, when the sisters closed Marian Heights Academy, a girls' boarding school.

The five-story, 105,000-square-foot Madonna Hall opened in 1970 as a residence hall for Academy students.

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress, said, "For 16 years, our community and various consultants have unsuccessfully tried to repurpose Madonna Hall, to find an entity that could use it for a ministry or a business. But interested parties have deemed it too large for the population of this area, plus it does not meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and it would require an incredible amount of renovation expense.



"While sitting idle, Madonna Hall has inevitably deteriorated. The economic reality is too much to ignore. So we feel it prudent to no longer spend money on this facility."

It is hoped to begin deconstruction by late fall and finish by the sisters' Summer Social on June 2-3, 2017.

"Although it will be difficult to see this building gone," said Sister Barbara

Lynn, "we look forward to how opening up this area will provide opportunities for sustainability and growth. It will allow us to create a closer entrance to our church that is more accessible for the sisters and monastery guests, particularly those with mobility issues. In addition, it enables us to invest our finances more into ministries and the people we serve and less into an aging facility."

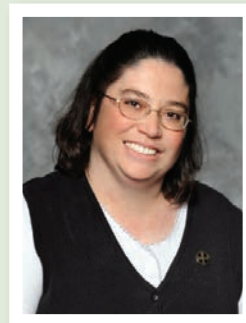
Sister Sarah Cathleen Yungwirth honored for youth ministry

Sister Sarah Cathleen Yungwirth, associate director of vocations for the Archdiocese of Louisville, recently received the "Companions on the Journey Award," which is awarded by the National Federation for Youth Ministry.

Dr. Carole Goodwin, director of youth ministry for the Archdiocese of Louisville, nominated Sister Sarah Cathleen "for her leadership and service to our Archdiocese of Louisville TEC (Teens and 20s

Encounter Christ) program and support for nine of our Louisville TEC weekends."

In addition to working with teens in the TEC program in Louisville, Sister Sarah Cathleen has also volunteered in parish youth ministry programs and has served in the TEC program for the Diocese of Evansville.



Sisters earn doctorates

Recently, two Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand earned advanced degrees from local universities. Sister Kate Willegal earned a Doctor of Nursing Practice with a concentration in organizational and systems leadership from the University of Southern Indiana. Sister Kathleen Marie Cash earned a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on mathematics education from the University of Louisville.

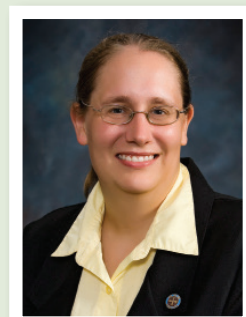


Prior to earning her doctorate, Sister Kate was a nursing instructor for Vincennes University, Jasper Campus. During the last year of her doctoral preparation, she was the nurse clinician for the post-surgical and pediatric units at Memorial Hospital and Health Care Center in Jasper, Indiana. She has continued in that position. Sister Kate's doctoral

project was to develop the Interprofessional Research Council at Memorial Hospital. The council was officially chartered at the hospital in July, 2015. Sister Kate plans to use her doctorate

in several leadership roles at Memorial Hospital, including the facilitation of the nurses' professional growth in the areas of evidence-based practice and research. Currently, Sister Kate is the chairperson of the Interprofessional Research Council.

Sister Kathleen Marie Cash taught math at Trinity High School in Louisville, Kentucky, prior to and while earning her Ph.D. For her dissertation, Sister Kathleen Marie researched teacher self-perceptions and student academic engagement in elementary school mathematics. Sister Kathleen Marie returned to Trinity High School to teach math this year and hopes to work with teachers to help improve their instruction in mathematics in the future.



We are very proud of our sisters and express our gratitude to them for their perseverance in their studies. We know that they will continue to serve God's people well into the future.

In memoriam by Sister Briana Elisabeth Craddock

Sister Assunta Highbaugh

September 17, 1916 – July 14, 2016

Sister Assunta touched many lives through her 85 years as a Benedictine. She lived a life of prayer and service, and relied on God during joyful times as well as in times of pain and trial.

As a founding member of the California community and as prioress, Sister Assunta knew that spiritual formation had been entrusted to her; she wanted the sisters in her care to love community life and service to others as much as she did. She encouraged others to do what they felt God was calling them to do. Sister Assunta delighted in the world around her. She enjoyed parties and having fun. Many people noticed the twinkle in her eye that spoke of her God connection and of her care and concern for others.



Sister Mary Clare Scheessele

November 17, 1925 – June 7, 2016

Sister Mary Clare was spiritual and prayerful. She called others to also see God in the everyday, especially in nature and community. She enjoyed fishing and sitting in the sun. She often prayed in the Eucharistic chapel and enjoyed centering prayer.

She shared her gifts of wisdom, intuition, and integrity. She was a good friend, listened without judgment and offered practical, sound advice. Many sought her counsel. Sister Mary Clare valued education. She worked tirelessly to help youth determine their vocations, and invited many to consider religious life. Sister Mary Clare often drew out gifts and abilities that individuals did not know they possessed.



Sister Barbara Jean Luebbehusen

November 2, 1949 – April 6, 2016

Sister Barbara Jean had deep faith and lived simply, joyfully, and fully. She was loving, patient, and often put others' needs before her own. Steady and quiet, she also was adventurous. She liked to have fun, and wanted others to also enjoy life.

Sister Barbara Jean knew the value of work. Her devotion to students was evident through her tireless efforts, and through their relationships. Students' faces lit up when they saw her. She was known as a favorite teacher. She also put a great deal of energy into the monastery bakery, and focused on making the cookies as perfect as they could be. Throughout her life, she was aware of God's many gifts. In her last days she reminded others, "Remember that we are blessed to have each other. We are so blessed. Everyone needs to know that."



Sister Ida Otto

April 10, 1943 – April 23, 2016

Sister Ida was a joyful woman of faith who loved her community and family. She was generous, kind, patient, tenderhearted, welcomed all, and wanted the best for all.

She was an excellent gardener. Always happy to have land to cultivate, it pleased her to share the produce with others. Just as she planted seeds in her garden, she planted seeds of love. She enjoyed working with youth, and helped children feel at home in her classroom. She believed in each child and wanted each to do well. She always put the children's needs first. Sister Ida's love for others was a true gift to all. We will miss her joyful presence and welcoming spirit.



Complete obituaries can be found at thedome.org.

Sister Carlita Koch

July 1, 1936 – August 13, 2016

Sister Carlita touched the hearts of many people through her kindness, consideration, and thoughtfulness. She was a community-minded woman. As prioress in the 1970's, she addressed the need to follow the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council. She was a mentor and guide to many, and exemplified the best characteristics of a spiritual leader. She had the foresight and vision to encourage the community to steward its resources and address the needs of members.

Her kindness and thoughtfulness were also apparent in family



relationships. She wanted everyone to be treated equally and to be included. She often put others' needs ahead of her own.

Prayer was central to her life. That foundation gave her the strength and courage to further her education, begin careers of pastoral care and parish ministry, and later establish a support group for people with Parkinson's disease.

We are grateful for Sister Carlita's presence and service to our Ferdinand community. May she rest in peace.

Sisters “uplifting” for donor reception hosts

Chris Dodd, manager of Jaya’s Authentic Foods, felt it was wonderful that the Evansville, Indiana, restaurant could host a donor reception for the sisters last spring.

The sisters hold the events so they can deliver an in-person thank you to the generous donors that support the sisters’ various ministries.

Chris and his mother, Jaya, owner of the restaurant and a friend of the sisters for over 40 years, are happy to do fundraisers for causes they believe in. Nearly 80 guests attended the event.

“The spirituality that the sisters have is uplifting,” said Chris. “It reminds me that things are always not as bad as they seem. It provides me with a sense of direction towards what I can be and what I should be.”

Chris was also struck by the way Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz “was able to captivate the room” with her presentation. He fully supports the sisters’ goal “to grow and expand further into this century.”

He received many positive comments about the event from guests, including “how nice it was for the sisters to come to Evansville to do this.”



Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz (left) and Jaya Dodd (center) greet a guest at the donor reception at Jaya’s Authentic Foods restaurant in Evansville, Indiana.

“I’m glad they chose us to host this event,” said Chris, “because it’s for such a good cause. Listening to Sister Barbara Lynn really made me believe in them growing the number of people in the sisterhood.”

Sisters of St. Benedict Programs and Retreats at the Benedictine Hospitality Center at Kordes Hall

| | | |
|------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| November 11-13, 2016 | Brewing with the Spirit: A Monastic Craft Beer Experience | Vince Luecke & Andy Hedinger |
| November 29-30, 2016 | How to Read the Gospel of John with Understanding | Father Eugene Hensell, OSB |
| February 24-26, 2017 | Brewing with the Spirit: A Monastic Craft Beer Experience | Vince Luecke & Andy Hedinger |
| March 3-5, 2017 | Brewing with the Spirit: A Monastic Craft Beer Experience | Vince Luecke & Andy Hedinger |
| March 18, 2017 | The Book of Glory: Reflections on John 13-21 | Father Eugene Hensell, OSB |
| March 31-April 1, 2017 | Healing and Music | Ruth Stanley |
| April 13-16, 2017 | Triduum Retreat | |
| June 11-18, 2017 | Private/Personal Retreat | |
| September 8-15, 2017 | Directed Retreat | |

As part of their outreach, the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand offer group or individual programs and retreats that educate and provide personal spiritual direction. These programs develop a deeper awareness of God, the world, oneself, and others that leads to a more meaningful and fulfilling life. The sisters also open their facilities and grounds to groups seeking a hospitable, peace-filled environment for meetings, programs, or other gatherings.

For more information, or to register: 812-367-1411, ext. 2915 • 800-880-2777 • www.thedome.org/programs



Volunteers inspired by ‘attitude of gratitude’

by Greg Eckerle

Not many people volunteer to work on their vacation, much less drive four hours to do it.

But three lady friends from Winamac, Indiana, gladly make that trek to the monastery each summer to help out the sisters.



Top: Julie Chapman rubs down a door.

Above: Volunteers Linda Webb, Julie Chapman, and Diane Kolish

The three used to take social excursions together, but then decided to instead perform some service for others during that time. They put Diane Kolish, a farmer, in charge of finding a worthy cause to befriend.

“I received a flyer in the mail from these lovely ladies (the sisters), because they needed help with their boiler,” said Diane. “It was a fundraiser. So I looked them up on the internet.” The three liked what they saw, and contacted Sister Mary Philip Berger, volunteer director, to line up a service trip.

Their first of three annual trips was in 2014. Their main project was to paint the monastery’s basement floor. Since the basement was in use during the day, they performed the work at night. Sister Mary Philip playfully nicknamed them the “Ladies of the Night.” The title stuck, and the three derive as much fun out of it as anyone. In fact, the kidding and joking between them and the sisters is a big reason why a bond was quickly formed, and why the three look forward to returning each year.

Linda Webb, the head of a nursing department at a Winamac hospital, recalled that everyone they met was so friendly and welcoming, and she knew immediately it would be a great venture.



Linda Webb paints a door frame.

“Every year we feel like we get more out of it than what we’ve actually done,” said Linda. They clean, paint, hammer, fix doors, and think it’s no big deal. They are true home improvement gurus. As for what they get in return, one of Linda’s favorite phrases about the sisters is “the attitude of gratitude here is amazing.”

“It’s a privilege to come down here to work, to be with the sisters. It doesn’t feel like work. My husband will say, ‘You pay somebody to paint our house, yet you go down there to paint,’” said Linda, laughing.

Linda diligently tries to practice the sisters’ trait of gratitude when she returns to Winamac. “Everyone at the monastery acknowledges you, smiles, and has a kind word. I know how good that felt here, so I carry that home with me.” Her hospital is working on a service excellence program, and she terms the sisters’ hospitality as “service excellence.” Linda is looking to transfer her learnings from the monastery to her hospital department. “Service excellence is not just how we treat our patients, but how we treat each other, too. That’s what we’re striving to improve. And the sisters model that. You can see Christ through the sisters.”

Linda also noticed that the sisters pass no judgment on what’s happening in others’ lives. That’s another trait she’s trying to replicate in herself. She wants to help model that for the patients she cares for and for her co-workers. “Again, it’s making sure that I display that attitude of gratitude.”

The third Winamac volunteer, Julie Chapman, is a pharmacist. She also tries to take back to her family, workplace, and community the sisters’ values of kindness, patience, and acceptance of people. “To us, (volunteering for the sisters) is such a rewarding experience. We work, but we have fun. It’s a peaceful setting (here). It’s just a grounding. I go home and think, OK, slow down, relax, life is good. Appreciate what we do have, and don’t rush through it.”

Diane appreciated how sisters they don’t know will come up to the trio and thank them for being there, and for what they’re doing. “So when I go home I try to do that, to go out of my way to say something nice to somebody.”

The sisters naturally have also helped the volunteers spiritually. “Being able to participate with them in their prayers, I’m now listening to the readings more, to the psalms and the Gospels,” said Linda. “You’re able to put things away, and listen.” Julie liked the reminder at the monastery that you don’t have to work all day long, that one needs to take time and bring God back into focus. And carry that prayer through the rest of one’s workday.

The three have plenty of fun while volunteering in Ferdinand, whether they’re working or socializing with the sisters. They’ve learned new card games, enjoyed a German meal, and received behind-the-scenes tours of the church and bell tower. Julie joked that the first year they thought they’d go off by themselves to a movie or go shopping, but were happy when they didn’t. “It’s more fun to sit and be around the sisters,” she said. “It was much better than us going off doing our thing. The sisters are an inspiration.”

Linda laughs at the irony of her taking time off from her hospital work – her vacation time – to come work at the monastery. Diane says the monastery volunteer trip is her only vacation, and is glad they get to stay a full week.

“I’m glad that flyer came in the mail. This is home now for us,” said Diane. No longer are they looking to go someplace else for their working vacation. ■



Diane Kolish cleans a window at the house the Servants to Sisterhood volunteers will live in later in the summer.

Women of the Rule help ministries

by Greg Eckerle

The sisters and their ministries benefit greatly from the annual generosity of the Women of the Rule, but members of that philanthropy circle would be the first to tell you they gain a lot from their involvement, too.

Sue Ellspermann, a Women of the Rule member who is the new Ivy Tech Community College president and the former Indiana Lieutenant Governor, aptly described the feeling in her closing remarks at the group's annual awards luncheon.

"What we do here, women particularly, is we learn to give and to make a difference, and to do that in our own way," said Sue. "What we're doing here with the sisters, you all are such a part of us, and we just thank you for letting us be a part of it, too."

The Women of the Rule's part has grown impressively large in terms of their money donated to fund sisters' projects and ministries since 2010. The group has funded 42 projects to the tune of about \$300,000. The 92-member group is dedicated to making a difference in the world by financially supporting the sisters. For a \$1,000 membership, women can vote on annual award proposals, and enjoy various programs and activities.

Twenty percent of the yearly dues are also placed into a Women of the Rule Endowment, which has grown to over \$70,000.

"We just can't say how much we admire the work you (sisters) do here," Sue said. "And how you've helped us become Benedictine. My formation has been here – prayer, work, hospitality, and most especially, community. And then the opportunity to fund these amazing projects. What a gift it is for us to be able to share the blessings we've all received in a way that makes such an amazing difference. I'm just thrilled to be a part of this group."

The Women of the Rule chose six projects to fund this year. The initial three were funded in the first round of voting, done before the awards luncheon.

The first was a \$12,614 grant to the sisters' mission, Monastery Paz De La Cruz, in Morropon, Peru, to install new doors, dressers, lattices, tables, chairs, and windows. The prior material had deteriorated greatly since the monastery opened in 1967, and termites provided an ongoing challenge.

Another \$4,000 was donated to continue the repairs to the Ferdinand monastery's church organ. It will be used to replace the leather on the rest of the organ's pipes, enabling the instrument to stay in good working condition.

The third grant of \$9,200 will permit the Peru sisters to travel to Ferdinand in summer, 2017, to help celebrate the Ferdinand Benedictines' 150th anniversary and the Peruvians' 40th anniversary.

The top project voted in at the Women of the Rule luncheon was \$15,000 to help offset costs for hosting the Women of the Church conference in Ferdinand. The conference was designed to honor and support the work of women in the Church, and for participants to learn from and be inspired by gifted women serving in the Church today.

A grant of \$9,800 was given to the sisters' immigration services and Latino outreach efforts. It will be used for immigration training courses for two sisters, office



Women of the Rule members give Sister Barbara C. Schmitz (seated at right) a standing ovation for her long service in coordinating the group's efforts. Sue Ellspermann told the crowd, "Sister Barbara, you have done such a beautiful job. She's what brought this to life, and what brought all of us together for such a great cause."



Sister Jeana Visel (left) and Dr. Kimberly Baker react to receiving a \$15,000 grant for the Women of the Church Conference.

expenses, a women's retreat, and materials for Latino faith-based programs. The sisters offer immigration services to low-income, at-risk immigrant families who, sadly, often experience marginalization and discrimination. The sisters' family-based outreach gives Latinos opportunities to express their Catholic faith culturally.

The final award of \$2,626 went to help defray expenses for a planned mission trip in spring, 2017, to help clean up and refurbish an area wherever the need is great at that time. Participating will be sisters and young women who are looking at religious life.

Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, prioress, told the luncheon crowd, "... You touch our lives deeply. I cannot tell you how wonderful it has been to have you as part of our spirituality, our life, and our ability to minister. When we minister ... you're right there with us. ... I think this is possible because of the Women of the Rule. That is possible because of your generosity ... you're touching people ... all over the world ... what you're doing is vitally important to our missions."

Women of the Rule members talk often about how they enjoy helping change lives – including their own. They care about those in need, they strive to make a difference, and they know the power of God's love. Members have a spiritual bond with the sisters, and with each other as well. They pray together and support one another. As a member, you will become a part of something greater than yourself.

For more information about Women of the Rule, or if you are interested in joining, contact Sister Barbara C. Schmitz at bcschmitz@thedome.org or at 812-367-1411. ■

Sister Jane Michele wins Albion Fellows Bacon Award



Sister Jane Michele McClure, major gifts officer for Habitat for Humanity of Evansville, was named this year's Albion Fellows Bacon Award winner.

According to an article in the Evansville Courier & Press by Linda Negro, the Women's Equality Day Committee chose Sister Jane Michele for "her lifelong dedication to Southern Indiana."

The article quoted Sister Jane Michele as saying, "I live to see Evansville become cool. It is coming together because of the hard work and vision of many, many people who have never given up. For Evansville to be the best it can be you have to have opportunities for the people who live on the margins."

The story said Sister Jane Michele believes Habitat for Humanity allows her to help cast a wide net by giving those who could never get a loan to buy a house the opportunity to put in the sweat equity to help build it and ultimately a lower mortgage to pay off.

Patsy Sproatt, a Habitat volunteer who nominated Sister Jane Michele for the award, was quoted in the Courier & Press article, "I can think of no one who works more tirelessly to improve the quality of life for the people of Evansville. She raises the awareness of the problems of substandard housing, promotes the benefits of Habitat for Humanity, works with community groups and celebrates the success of those who give."

Sister Jane Michele was further quoted in the article, "If we are not actually helping the poor there is something wrong with us."

A subsequent letter to the Evansville Courier & Press by Eric Eades, a former student of Sister Jane Michele's who is a high school English teacher, was headlined "Sister Jane Michele McClure deserving of all and any honors." Eric's letter read in part, "... an award for this amazing person is long overdue. ... she has made the community, and by extension, the world, a better place ... she was like no other teacher I had met before. She infused a sense of humor into her teaching while also demanding that students give their best at all times. She taught me about English, of course, but she taught me about life. She taught me how to see the best in others ... (she) motivated me and inspired me ..."

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Calendar of Events

2016

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|
| October 11 | God Has a Plan for You |
| October 13 | God Has a Plan for You (Evansville) |
| October 15 | Benedictine Hills Pilgrimage |
| October 16 | Rite of Oblation of Oblates |
| October 22 | Monastery Gift Shop 20th Anniversary |
| October 30 | Mechtilde Series – Mark Hatfield |
| October 30 | Diamond Jubilee Celebration |
| November 4-6 | Come and See |
| November 15 | God Has a Plan for You |
| November 17 | God Has a Plan for You (Evansville) |
| November 18 | Christkindlmarkt Eve Performance |
| November 19-20 | Christkindlmarkt in Ferdinand |
| December 4 | Concert of Area Choirs |
| December 6 | God Has a Plan for You |
| December 8 | God Has a Plan for You (Evansville) |
| December 9-11 | A Monastic Experience |
| December 24 | Christmas Eve Mass |

2017

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| January 6-8 | Come and See Weekend |
| January 7 | Latino Program |
| January 17 | God Has a Plan for You |
| January 19 | God Has a Plan for You (Evansville) |
| January 22 | Oblate Meeting |
| February 10-12 | A Monastic Experience |
| February 16-19 | High School Come and See |
| February 18 | Oblate Meeting |
| March 18 | Oblate Meeting |
| March 24-26 | Come and See Weekend |
| April 21-23 | A Monastic Experience |
| April 22 | Oblate Meeting |

June 2-3
150th Anniversary Summer Social

Seek. Pray. Share.

Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana

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Sister Susan Ann and her fifth grade class happily swing through some square dancing, as they stomp, clap, and giggle while trying to accurately perform the do-si-do and promenade dance steps.