

# SEEKPRAYSHARE

SISTERS OF ST. BENEDICT OF FERDINAND, INDIANA

VOLUME 13 NUMBER 3 | FALL 2022



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Life is all about change. While many of us may not care for change, it's an inevitable part of modern life. That's as true here at the monastery as it is in the rest of the world.

In this issue of *Seek Pray Share*, we're celebrating change. A new Superior in Peru. New offerings from Monastery Goods & Services. New projects funded by our generous Women of the Rule.

But in the midst of all our changes, some things remain constant. The connection of our donors to the Sisters. Our own focus on ministering in ways old and new. The people we depend on every day to help us run the monastery, from employees to volunteers.

Through it all, two things are true. The Rule of St. Benedict continues to guide our path forward as people devoted to community, hospitality, work and prayer. And God continues to bless us on the journey with people like you.

Whatever changes may be happening in your life, one thing that never changes is our appreciation for you and our dedication to praying on your behalf.

May peace and joy be yours in abundance,

*Anita Louise Lowe, OSB*  
Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB  
Prioress

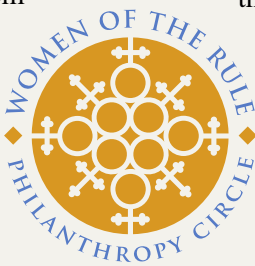




## Women of the Rule Fund Projects & Ministries.

On August 5, we were scheduled to hold our annual Women of the Rule Luncheon here at Monastery Immaculate Conception. As luck would have it, a Covid outbreak caused us to make it a remote event. Even so, our wonderful circle of women philanthropists joined us on Zoom to hear proposals from the Sisters for their consideration, then voted on which projects to fund.

Before the event even began, several projects were funded by members above and beyond their normal contribution to the Women of the Rule, including a women's book study on college campuses (part of our vocation outreach) and our Blessing Cabinet ministry for those in need. In the first round of voting before the event, nearly \$45,000 was awarded for projects ranging from renovations and kitchen equipment to training and education for the Sisters who drive our incredible Immigration Ministry.



The second round of voting, which took place live at the event, awarded over \$34,000 in funding for vocations at our daughter house at Monasterio Paz de la Cruz, for our Ministry to Incarcerated Women, for displays for the Gift Shop to more properly display the Sisters' bakery items, for iPads for our senior Sisters and much more.

In addition to the excitement of seeing these projects move forward and spending time online with our amazing Women of the Rule, we heard a lively talk on sustainability and the challenges of climate change from Dr. Phil Sakimoto, Director of the Minor in Sustainability at the University of Notre Dame and formerly the Program Manager and Acting Director of NASA's Space Science Education and Public Outreach Program.

**To learn more, contact Sisters of St. Benedict, Attn: Women of the Rule, Sister Barbara Catherine Schmitz, OSB**  
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# In Her Element

Sister Mary Claude  
Croteau's journey  
from the reservation.



“We were poor.” That’s how Sister Mary Claude Croteau describes life growing up in the 1930s on an Indian reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota. “The Depression was tough.”

One of seven children, Lois Croteau was French on her father’s side (her grandfather came to North Dakota from Canada by way of Minnesota) and native American on her mother’s side.

Even though the temperature in Belcourt, just ten miles from the Canadian border, could stay below zero for long stretches during the winter, “we played outside a lot,” recalls Sister Mary Claude. “I’m just used to being outside as much as I can.”

That hasn’t changed. Today, you’re likely to find the 91-year-old walking the grounds at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, spending time in the grotto or sitting under an archway enjoying the sun and fresh air.



As a child, she attended St. Ann’s Mission in Belcourt — the only school in the state that closed during the coldest months of the year. She attended an Indian boarding school in Marty, South Dakota for high school from September through May.

“Mom had seven kids in our little house, and we’d all be inside three days at a time with a blizzard,” she said. “I’m not sure how the woman survived! I loved her so much.”

It was at St. Ann’s Mission in Belcourt that she first met Sisters from Ferdinand, who had arrived in 1933. “I liked them,” she remembers. “They were good people, and they were fun.”

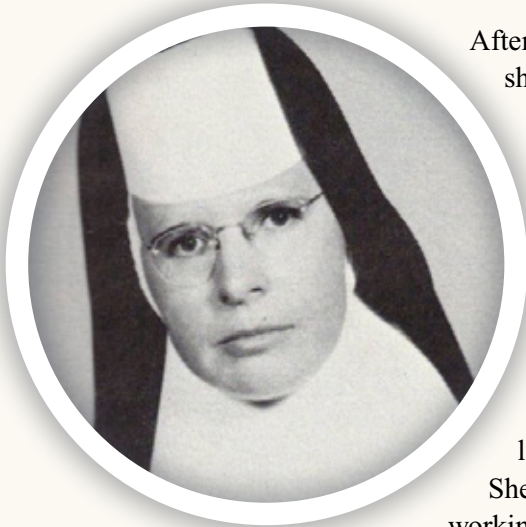
In fact, although religious life ran in the family (she had four cousins who were nuns, and one who was a priest), it was the lighter side of the Sisters that planted the seed of her vocation. “At choir practice, Sister Mary Oscar was such a lot of fun, and I thought, ‘I want to be like her!’”

**ABOVE:** Sister Mary Claude Croteau on her investing day, May 30, 1951.

In her junior year of high school, in 1947, she came to the Academy Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, and her brother Adolph attended St. Meinrad. “I was always in trouble,” she says with a smile. “I never liked school. I didn’t like being cooped up inside. But the Sisters put up with me.”

She ended up teaching nine years at the Academy. “I loved the kids, and I was with a good bunch of Sisters.”

She smiles at the thought of those days. “We just enjoyed ourselves. Those were my best growing years. I grew up during those years.”



After graduation in 1949, she returned to Marty and worked in the office of the Indian mission. She started to join the Sisters there, but it wasn’t a good fit. Leaving the convent there was, she recalls, “the lowest time in my life.”

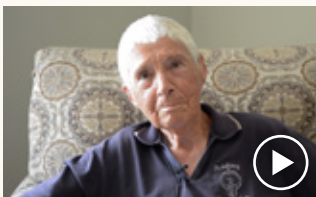
She soon found herself working in a neighboring mission, St. Michael’s.

That spring, she made the decision to return to Ferdinand. She entered the monastery on October 1, 1950 as Sister Mary Claude.

Armed with a Bachelor’s degree in Social Studies and a Master’s degree in History, she would spend a total of two decades in education, spending five of those years as principal at Christ the King in Evansville.

“One regret I have,” she says now, “is that I paddled a lot of little boys’ bottoms. I hate that I did that. And yet, I still hear from those kids. They don’t hold it against me.” (Paddling children who misbehaved was common at both home and school in those days.)

Returning to the monastery in Ferdinand, she opened a development office for Academy Immaculate Conception and worked with the director for three years. Looking back, she says the position wasn’t a good fit for her.



#### WATCH

Click the video above to see Sister Mary Claude tell her story.

She fell into teaching by accident. Most of her class went on to college, but she stayed at the monastery, working in the bakery and the laundry.

In her third year, they needed teachers, and Sister Mary Claude found herself back in the classroom, this time on the other side of the desk teaching English, religion, geography and algebra to sixth and seventh graders. “I went from the bakery to teaching!”



Sister Mary Claude has always been open about her experience as a recovering alcoholic. She found that *The Rule of St. Benedict*, particularly the chapter on humility, was vital in the way it paralleled the steps of recovery. She calls the process “a wonderful experience in my life,”

one she would eventually put to good use helping others in the same situation.



After recovering, she taught sixth grade in Jasper for two years, then spent nine years as the supervisor of buildings and grounds at the monastery.

She returned to college to earn another Masters degree in alcoholism counseling, and devoted the next thirteen years to helping others, including working in hospitals in Henderson and Madisonville.

Thinking about her young life as a Sister in the 1950s compared with women entering religious life today, she sees how much has changed.

“Everything was so different...so strict. And then watching it change and living through that change. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world.”

“Sisters come in older now,” she observes. “They’ve already had jobs and homes, so they go through a time where it just hits them. We were kids when we entered, so we didn’t have that.”

Things changed. By 1958, the Sisters were no longer praying Latin prayers. But they wore habits long after other communities had stopped.

When the change came, though, it was put into effect all at once for the whole community. “I was principal at Christ the King. One year I came with the full habit and the next year, the modified habit.”

Then came no habit. She recalls scrubbing Madonna Hall in jeans and a sweatshirt, when she was asked to drive another Sister to the bus station in Evansville.



“For the first time, people didn’t turn around and look at me. I never will forget the feeling. It was freeing.”

“I loved the habit as long as we wore it,” she says now. “I really did. And I wouldn’t go back to it for anything. It was part of who we were...but now we’ve moved on.”

Reflecting on 72 years as a Sister of St. Benedict, she says, “I’ve had a blessed life. The problems I’ve had were my own doing. I think we pay as we go...you make a decision and pay for it.”

“We’re a family. We do everything together. I think we’re a good community. We like to have fun together. We enjoy one another. I can’t imagine otherwise.”

“Sometimes, I think I’m in heaven already. I never expected to feel the peace and contentment I feel today. All I can do is be grateful.”



## FROM FAR LEFT

*The many faces of Sister Mary Claude: as a teacher at the Academy; in the infirmary after being hit by a car in 1997; with her brother, Brother Jerome (Adolph) Croteau of St. Meinrad Archabbey; and today at Monastery Immaculate Conception.*

*In 1933, Sisters of St. Benedict from Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand were sent to staff St. Ann’s Indian Mission in Belcourt, North Dakota. Just minutes from the Canadian border, the town lies within the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation, seat of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. In 1956, Queen of Peace Monastery was established as a daughter house of the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand, and six of the Sisters resided there. Ten years later, the Belcourt monastery became independent.*



## Busy Bees.

It's often said that the Sisters are busy as bees. Well, our actual bees have been pretty busy, too. Under the watchful eye and loving care of our resident beekeeper, Sister Teresa Gunter, our productive bees are providing enough honey for two harvests a year. Enter Honey from the Dome. You can now purchase jars of honey, honey straws — and soon, beeswax candles — all made from the harvest of our hives. These Honey from the Dome products are available in our Gift Shop and online.

## Winter Is Coming!

Fall signals the approach of the Christmas holiday, and with it, the arrival of the Sisters' Christmas catalog. Whether you're looking for the perfect gift for everyone on your list, or sweets to fill up every stocking — or just something to reward yourself for making it through another year — this wishbook has something for everybody.

Visit the Gift Shop in person, or shop online and have everything you need delivered right to your door. Best of all, every purchase you make helps support the Sisters' ministries, from aiding the hungry, the homeless and the hopeless, to providing spiritual direction and retreats, to assisting immigrants on a legal path to citizenship and so much more. So watch your mailbox — or visit [www.thedome.org](http://www.thedome.org) and see the online version!



## Altar Breads

The Sisters of St. Benedict are proud to offer altar breads for your parish. All breads have a carefully molded edge sealed minutes after baking to prevent crumbs. They're made of only pure wheat flour and water without additives, right here in the United States in an exceptionally clean and modern facility.

Throughout production and packaging, the breads remain untouched by human hands, and are delivered to your church in cellophane rolls in boxes, barrier film bags, and hermetically sealed plastic containers. If you have questions or wish to place an order, contact Sister Rachel Geracitano at [altarbread@thedome.org](mailto:altarbread@thedome.org) or call 812.367.1411, extension 2638.





From August 4 to 9, the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) held their 2022 Biennial Meeting, “Weaving St. Benedict’s Way of Life into the Future,” at St. Meinrad Archabbey, just down the road in St. Meinrad, IN. NAABOD includes members from 22 states and Canada, and provides assistance in ongoing formation of Oblate directors, and a forum for discerning needs of formation and leadership. Keynote speakers were Fr. Thomas Gricoski of St. Meinrad, Sr. Judith Sutera from St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas, and our own Sr. Kathryn Huber from Monastery Immaculate Conception, presenting on prioress Sr. Anita Louise Lowe’s behalf. About three dozen of our 150 Oblates also gathered for a picnic in August! You can find out more about becoming an Oblate on our website at [www.thedome.org](http://www.thedome.org).



## New Peru Superior

*Sister Magna Lucia Castillo Assumes Leadership.*

Monasterio Paz de la Cruz in Peru was established as a dependent monastery of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand in 1983. In July, our prioress, Sister Anita Louise Lowe, traveled to Peru for Sister Magna Lucia Castillo’s installation as Superior. After nearly forty years, the monastery continues to flourish and attract young women to religious life. We look forward to watching Sister Magna Lucia blossom in this leadership role for her community



# Made by Martha





The Bakery operated by the Sisters of St. Benedict at Monastery Immaculate Conception is a busy place. And it only gets busier as summer turns to fall and Christmas draws closer.

But for the last three years, one person in particular has been a calm presence in even the most hectic moments, working quietly to keep the ovens busy and the Gift Shop shelves stocked. That person is Martha Wahl, one of the head bakers.

One of twelve children, Martha worked as a nurse in the area for forty-three years, primarily in doctors' offices. She retired five years ago, and after a couple of years, she thought it might be nice to find a part-time job she would enjoy, just to keep busy.

A lifelong baker, she applied for a position with the Sisters to work in the bakery, and the rest is history.

"I really enjoy it," says Martha, who may have the shortest commute of any employee who isn't a Sister; she can see her home from the bakery windows.

Martha busies herself making all of the varieties of cookies offered by the Sisters, including their Peanut Butter Cookies, Simply Lemon Cookies, Gingersnaps, Hildegards and Hildegard Minis.

One of her specialties is the Springerle, the festive German cookie that's a holiday favorite. She also brings her special touch to another popular holiday item, Sister Anita's Bourbon-Soaked Fruit Cake.

And Martha has brought a recipe or two of her own with her. If you've ever had the euphoric experience of savoring the Sisters' Cinnamon Rolls when they're available, you have Martha's magic to thank for all that deliciousness.

About her love of baking, she says, "I've just always enjoyed it — the final product, being very particular and proud of what I've made. And of course, I've always loved to eat it!"



"I always thought I would enjoy having a café with rolls and cookies and things like that.

Working here, I get the enjoyment of it all, but I get to go home and not have to worry about the paperwork or the expenses or any of that."

You can enjoy the fruits of Martha's hard work by stopping in our Gift Shop, or ordering online and having all that goodness delivered to your door!



#### **WATCH**

*Click the video above to see Martha talk about the bakery.*



# Connected to the Sisters





Jenny and Larry LaGrange met when they were both pursuing education degrees from Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. She was studying to be an elementary school educator. He was working toward becoming a high school teacher.

The couple married and had three boys. And that's where their connection with the Sisters of St. Benedict began.

Their oldest son had been very precocious, and that had gotten him into some trouble with teachers in his early years. Their youngest, Justin, was a lot like his oldest brother, so when it came time for him to start kindergarten, Jenny and Larry braced themselves for trouble.

Enter Sister Ida Otto, who was teaching at Precious Blood School in Jasper, where Jenny was teaching art and Justin was starting kindergarten.

"Sister Ida Otto was just a plain wonderful person," enthuses Jenny. "She loved everybody, and everybody loved Ida. Our Justin loved her and she loved him. She thought all the precocious things he did were fine, and they were just buddies."

"So he had a great start to school. We couldn't have asked for anything better to have happened to him. We just thought she was such a blessing in our lives."

In fact, the couple remained friends with Sister Ida, staying in touch through the years, attending her 50th Jubilee and having dinner with her not long before she passed away in 2016 at the age of 73.

Jenny also recalls working with Sister Mary Carol Kinghorn when she was substitute teaching at the school where Sister Mary Carol was principal.

"She had a 'gimmick' for everything," marvels Jenny. "She had a gimmick to get kids to eat their lunch. She had a map club. She had the word of the week."

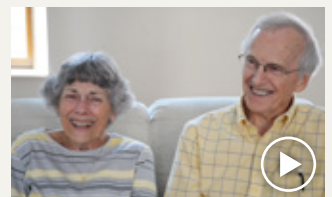
"She would stand out and greet the kids when they got off the bus. If somebody had a new baby, or their mom was sick, she knew it and would ask about it. She was there to help kids who had trouble and kids who were exceptional."

It was during her time at Precious Blood that Jenny discovered that the Sisters hadn't paid into Social Security before the 1980s, and that they had no pensions.

That stayed on her mind. She realized that, unlike priests, the Sisters had no parish to support them. They also have the historic monastery to care for, as well as employees to take care of.

That led the couple to a decision. "We're not rich people," Jenny said, but they realized they could afford to take a portion of the distribution from Larry's retirement each year and give it to the Sisters. In addition, they have remembered the Sisters in their will as part of their estate plan, in the process becoming members of the Sisters' St. Hildegard Society.

If you have a connection to the Sisters like Jenny and Larry, or if you simply care about the work they do, visit [www.thedome.org](http://www.thedome.org) to see how you can support their ministries.



#### **WATCH**

*Click the video above to see Jenny and Larry talk about the Sisters.*

# Indy Sisters.

Two of our Sisters make a home away from home in Indianapolis.

While the Sisters of St. Benedict call Ferdinand home, a number of our members live and work away from Monastery Immaculate Conception, including two working in Indianapolis.



Sister Dorothy Graf is a chaplain at St. Francis Hospital in Indianapolis. She began this ministry in September, 2004, and in 2012, became the midnight — 8:30 a.m. chaplain for the entire Indianapolis hospital. She responds to every Code Blue (a patient's heart has stopped) and calls for cardiac arrest by caring for family members while staff treat the patient. If a patient dies, she offers prayer and helps the family with procedures. She gets the call when patients are upset or can't sleep and ask to speak with a chaplain. She meets and welcomes patients who are being admitted for surgery, explains their spiritual care availability during their stay and offers prayer for them. During the pandemic, Sister Dorothy spent a lot of time with staff as they struggled to serve Covid patients. It was a stressful time, and much of that stress lingers today, so Sister Dorothy is still very much in demand.

Sister Karen Durliat is the Director of Religious Education at St. Patrick Parish in Fountain Square in Indianapolis. St. Patrick's was originally the home of Irish immigrants. Today, the parish congregation is 95% Hispanic. Her challenge is to provide faith formation classes for children, teens, and adults in English and/or Spanish as needed. They typically have 70 children receive First Communion, 70 teens receive Confirmation, and around 15 young people and adults received into the church each year.



We invite you to pray for all our Sisters who live and work away from the monastery in Ferdinand. And know that you and yours are always in our prayers.

## Digging In.

Tap into your talents to volunteer with the Sisters.



There's a lot of work to do around Monastery Immaculate Conception. Fortunately, we have a crew of volunteers who are generous with their time and talent and lend us a hand now and then. If you have a soft spot for the Sisters, and a talent to share, there's often painting, gardening, planting, trimming, moving and cleaning that needs to be done. Just email [volunteers@thedome.org](mailto:volunteers@thedome.org) and we'll help you find your sweet spot!



# Welcoming Our Newest Postulants.

On Sunday morning, September 4, Katie Cummings, a Kansas native transplanted to Wisconsin, and Callie Nowlin from Texas, made their Entrance into Postulancy at Monastery Immaculate Conception, the first step toward becoming a Sister of St. Benedict of Ferdinand. In a ceremony attended by the community, the two were given postulant medals and, in the tradition of “Ora et Labora” (prayer and work), morning and evening prayer books and aprons handmade by Sister Charlene Wheelless. They were led in by Sister Jill Reuber, our Director of Vocations, after which Formation Director Sister Louise Laroche stepped forward, symbolizing the transition from initial discernment to initial formation.



## Special Events.

From small workshops to large group gatherings,  
we have the perfect space for you event.



The monastery offers a variety of collaborative meeting spaces to accommodate your group's needs. Flexible options for full and half-day rental are available. The Media Center is a flexible space for workshop or training needs. St. Gertrude Hall is our most versatile space for large groups, with movable walls and a maximum capacity of 300 people. The St. Scholastica Room provides comfortable executive seating for a maximum of 36 guests and includes a hospitality kitchen. Named in honor of our Academy alumnae, the Alumnae Room is great for small groups and provides users with the opportunity to set up in any way they need. You can find out more and inquire about a space at [www.thedome.org](http://www.thedome.org) or by calling 812-367-1411.



