

SEEKPRAYSHARE

SISTERS OF ST. BENEDICT OF FERDINAND, INDIANA

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One of the four core values and guiding principles for the Sisters of St. Benedict is “community.” While that refers to our own monastic religious community here in Ferdinand, it also speaks to our need to connect in meaningful ways with the wider community around us.

In this issue of *Seek Pray Share*, you’ll see some vivid examples of how we’re engaging with the community outside the monastery walls. You’ll learn about Sister Jane Michele McClure’s work on St. Theresa Place in Evansville, transforming the site of a former parish into a vibrant new Habitat for Humanity community.

You’ll read about Sister Donna Marie Herr, also in Evansville, fighting hunger every day at the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry. Both she and Sister Jane Michele also taught in Evansville for many, many years.

You’ll also hear about Pat Koch, whom we recently honored with our Dome Award for her wonderful contributions both to her community and our own. You’ll learn about upcoming retreats and programs we’re offering to your community as well.

We hope this issue finds you well. You are truly a vital part of our community, and we are so very thankful for you. We continue to keep you in our prayers.

Anita Louise Lowe, OSB

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB
Prioress



Dome Award Presented to Pat Koch

You might say it all began with letters to Santa. When Patricia Koch was a little girl growing up in Mariah Hill, Indiana, she helped her father, “Santa Jim” Yellig, answer children’s letters to St. Nick. She’s been helping people ever since — especially the Sisters of St. Benedict, who honored her in August with our Dome Award.

As a young woman, Pat spent a decade away from home as a member of the Daughters of Charity, serving as a nurse in St. Louis, New Orleans and Chicago. Her life’s journey then brought her away from the order and back home to Santa Claus, Indiana.

In 1940, Santa Claus Land was founded by Louis Koch as the nation’s first theme park. Pat’s dad worked as Santa while her mom managed the dining room. Pat also worked there, and met Louis’ son, Bill.

She and Bill married, and for 40 years, the two worked side by side, growing the park and the town while raising their five children. Today, that small, hometown theme park is nationally known Holiday World, welcoming more than a million visitors a year. And for decades, Pat was the smiling face of Holiday World, whether on TV commercials or greeting guests at the entrance.

Along the way, the couple became a part of our Ferdinand Benedictine community. Pat and Bill met twin Sisters Mary Carmel and Mary Carmen, and became friends with and involved in the work of the Sisters.

Although Bill has passed away, Pat remains a vital force for the Sisters. She is a founding member of both the Executive Advisory Committee and the Women of the Rule Philanthropy Circle, and has sponsored the Dome Golf Classic every year since 2004.

Pat has lent enthusiastic support to every one of the Sisters’ campaigns and fundraising efforts, with her leadership and her own social and personal capital, spreading the word about the work of the Sisters.

She was even able to accompany a number of the Sisters on a Women of the Rule trip to Peru and Machu Picchu, which she says has been a highlight of her life. While there, they were able to visit Monasterio Paz de la Cruz in Morropón, Peru, a dependent ministry founded by the Sisters in Ferdinand in 1983.

We are so thankful for Pat’s constant friendship and support — and for that wonderful smile!





2024 Retreat Schedule

Seek God in Silence — Quiet Retreats

Spiritual retreats allow you to take time away from the frantic pace of the world in a quiet, peaceful environment where you can focus on your own spiritual journey, all while enjoying the hospitality and support of the Sisters of St. Benedict.

Retreats are offered in a variety of formats, but all are designed to guide you toward a closer walk with God and a deeper spirituality. Both individual and group retreats are available.

If you can't stay for an entire retreat, feel free to come for as many days as you're able. You can also schedule a shorter stay on your own time to enjoy the benefits of Benedictine hospitality.

Renew and revitalize your body, mind and spirit with rest and prayer in a peaceful environment. These Quiet Retreats open and close with a prayer service. There will be the opportunity for personal reflection, reading, walking, and praying daily with the Benedictine community. All meals will be in silence with reflective music.

Mar. 4 | 7 p.m. – Mar. 8 | 10 a.m.

May 20 | 7 p.m. – May 24 | 10 a.m.

Cost: \$375 (includes meals and overnight accommodations)

Capacity: 11

Aug. 2 | 7 p.m. – Aug. 9 | 10 a.m.

Cost: \$575 (includes meals and overnight accommodations)

Capacity: 11

Keep Watch with Me — Tridium Retreat

Experience the Tridium—Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday—with the Benedictine monastic community. Join the sisters for daily prayer as well as the Mass of the Last Supper on Thursday, Veneration of the Cross on Friday, the Easter Vigil on Saturday evening, and the Sunrise Service on Sunday.

Add to your experience by praying the Stations of the Cross on Grotto Hill, reflecting, reading and walking on the Monastery grounds. All meals will be in silence with reflective music.

Mar. 27 | 7 p.m. – Mar. 31 | 10 a.m.

Cost: \$400 (includes meals and overnight accommodations)

Capacity: 7

Directed Silent Retreats

Directed retreats offer time alone to be still and listen to God, with spiritual direction to guide you along the way. You can participate in scheduled week-long directed retreats or arrange for your own individual directed retreat, from a single day to eight days.

Sept. 6 | 7 p.m. – Sept. 13 | 10 a.m.

Oct. 11 | 7 p.m. – Oct. 18 | 10 a.m.

Cost: \$800 (includes meals, overnight accommodations and spiritual direction)

Capacity: 11

Directed Quiet Retreats are led by members of the Spiritual Direction team for the Ferdinand Benedictine community.

All retreats held in the Benedictine Hospitality Center at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand. All times Eastern. Register online at www.thedome.org.



Getting the Sisters Out of the Rain

As you may recall, just a year ago the 86-year-old slate roof over St. Benedict Hall was failing badly. St. Benedict Hall is the part of the monastery that houses the Sisters' residential and dining quarters, as well as the Community Health Center where they receive regular medical care when needed. Each new rainfall saw the Sisters hauling out buckets to put under leaks, and cleaning up rain-soaked, crumbling ceiling tiles that were falling down.

No more. Because of generous supporters like you, we were able to replace the worn out slate roof with more modern materials that are designed to keep the Sisters dry for decades. The process included removal of the old roof, making any needed structural updates, then installing the new roof. That process was completed earlier this year and, as you can see, the Sisters in St. Benedict Hall have been able to put away the bucket and brooms. Thank you!





Service with a Smile

Sister Donna Marie Herr feeds families at St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry

If you ever need an example of someone who serves with a glad heart, look no further than Sister Donna Marie Herr, who always seems to be smiling as she manages the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in Evansville, where she is also Coordinator of the Office of Emergency Assistance.

In true Benedictine fashion, she's quick to give credit to her volunteers. "We couldn't possibly operate without our volunteers," she says. As manager, she recruits and schedules a different set of volunteers for each half day, every week. If a scheduled volunteer can't make it, she has to call in one of her subs.

By midday on a recent Tuesday, she and her team of volunteers — also smiling — had already served 67 families, and would reach a hundred by day's end. And that put a big smile on Sister Donna Marie's face.

Her duties extend far beyond making sure she has volunteers on hand. She also has to make sure the pantry has food to meet the need. Some is ordered, some is donated and some has to be picked up when supplies are low. Sister Donna Marie tracks it all, makes daily grocery lists, records donations, writes thank you letters — everything it takes to keep track of the day to day operations of the pantry.

"And we're so blessed with our local gardeners," she notes, "who are so generous in donating their produce. In addition, we've gotten a wonderful program through Tri-State Food Bank, from local farmers that have supplied us with an abundance of corn and tomatoes — master gardeners, you know! There are just so many groups that help us out."

(Founded in 1982, Tri-State Food Bank distributes more than 9 million pounds of food each year to over 250 feeding programs in 33 counties in Indiana, Illinois and Kentucky.)

The food pantry gives each family enough groceries to make three meals a day for four days. "So it's not providing all of people's food needs," Sister Donna Marie says, "but it's providing a little extra help, so that they can use that money to pay other bills.

And the people who come here, many of them are the working poor. They have jobs. They just don't make enough money to pay all of their bills. And some of their bills are so high — utility, rent bills — we know that from the front office."

When people come in, a volunteer works with them to check their eligibility. Then another volunteer goes through the food list with them, so they can choose the items they want. Still other volunteers are pulling that order of food from the shelves.

"We let people take as much fresh produce as they possibly can use during the summer months when we have an abundance," Sister Donna Marie notes, adding with that ever-present smile, "it always thrills me to see people excited about taking the fresh vegetables, because we do want people to eat healthy foods."

"Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."
Matthew 25:34-35



The St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry in Evansville is one of six pantries that are linked together in what's known as the Emergency Food Pantry System of Evansville. A computer system can tell if people have been to one of the other five pantries. The pantries ask those they assist to wait 28 to 30 days between visits if possible, to ensure that there will be enough food to help as many in need as possible.

"During COVID, our numbers were down," recalls Sister Donna Marie. "I know that's surprising. But people were getting some extra funds from the government. And there were other groups in the city that were giving away food."



Still, the food pantry remained open during COVID, even though their numbers were down. Today, however, the number of people being served has returned to pre-pandemic levels — especially during the

summer months. "When the kids are home in the summer, eating more meals at home," says Sister Donna Marie, "our numbers are usually pretty high."

Beyond the food pantry, there's her role as Coordinator of the Office of Emergency Assistance. Again, she schedules volunteers so there are two people there every day to answer phones. "People call who might need help with utilities or rent," she explains, "so we take those requests, and I coordinate that as well."

Many in Evansville know Sister Donna Marie from before her food pantry days, when she spent 38 years teaching at Mater Dei High School.

In the early years, she taught social studies, then less social studies but more religion. "I love teaching," she says, again with a smile. "I loved it when I was there. There came a time when I was ready to stop. But I always said there was never a day that went by when the kids didn't make me laugh about something."

"Their hard work, their jovial spirit — I felt they kept me young, and I enjoyed their activities as well. The interesting thing," she points out, "is that there are a number of former students now volunteering here at the food pantry. So that's always a nice thing to see." And quite a testament to her influence on them as well.

Asked when she first began thinking about being a Sister, she says, "really, the idea was there from early on. I remember specifically in the second grade, Sister Mary Lawrence asked me if I ever thought about being a Sister. And I think that's when I really started thinking about it. I still remember where I was standing in the classroom when she asked me that question."

"But I think it was probably the example of my mother and dad, you know — their faithfulness to prayer, to attending church services — that really nurtured that initial desire to look at being a Sister. And of course, the idea came and went, but it never left me."

"I have never regretted the decision I made when I entered, although it was very hard to leave home, because we're a very close knit family. But, you know, I still feel very close to my family."

And her Benedictine family feels very close to this special servant with a smile.



Starlets Make Their Debut.

The Sisters are always looking for new ways to tantalize your taste buds. So we're delighted to introduce our newest creation. The Starlet is a wonderfully airy cookie that will practically melt in your mouth. This whimsical, star-shaped treat pairs perfectly with that morning cup of coffee or hot tea, or an afternoon glass of something refreshing. And it comes in three fantastic flavors: almond, coconut and raspberry. They're ideal for lunches, a light bite between meals or a treat any time of the day. Order a package of each today, and see why they're already becoming one of our most popular gourmet treats.



New Catalog Is in the Mail!

Whether you're looking for more of the sisters' tasty treats, the perfect gift for special people on your list, something to help you on your own walk of faith, or even something to freshen up your closet or your home, you're sure to find it in the new Monastery Gift Shop catalog, arriving now in mailboxes. Its 32 pages are loaded with items for every taste. You can order directly from the catalog or online. Didn't get a copy? You can also find it on our website at www.thedome.org!

In Memoriam.

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



Sister Paulette Seng died at 10:12 p.m. on Monday, June 12, 2023, at Scenic Hills at the Monastery in Ferdinand. She was born Paula Seng on October 20, 1941, in Dubois, Indiana, the third of seven children of Ben and Henrietta (Dischinger) Seng. She entered the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in 1959 from St. Raphael Parish and made her monastic vows in 1961. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from St.

Benedict College and a Master's degree in English from Indiana State University. She taught at St. James School in Haubstadt, IN; St. Thomas School in Vincennes, IN; Ferdinand Consolidated Grade School; and Mater Dei High School in Evansville, IN. Over 25 years at Academy Immaculate Conception / Marian Heights Academy in Ferdinand, she served as English teacher, Dean of Student Affairs, English Department Chairperson, Acting Principal, Communications / Community Liaison, Alumni Director and in Special Events. With the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand, she worked as a Communications Associate in Mission Advancement. She most recently served in prayer ministry.



Sister Corita Hoffman died at 4:25 a.m. on Tuesday, June 27, 2023, at Scenic Hills at the Monastery in Ferdinand. She was born Mary Leona Hoffman on July 23, 1925, in Schnellville, Indiana, the second of eleven children of Leo and Anna (Hauser) Hoffman. She entered the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in 1944 from Sacred Heart Parish and made her monastic vows in 1946. She earned Bachelor's degrees in Education (from St. Benedict College) and Chemistry (from Spalding University) and a Master's degree in Secondary Administration from Marquette University. She taught elementary education at St. Mary School in Huntingburg, IN; St. Joseph School in Evansville IN;

St. Mary of the Knobs School in Floyd Knobs, IN; St. Joseph Hill School in Borden, IN; Mariah Hill Elementary School in Mariah Hill, IN; Fulda Elementary School in Fulda, IN; St. Anthony School in St. Anthony, IN; and St. Philip School in St. Philip, IN. She also taught Science at Mater Dei High School in Evansville, IN and Religion at Marian Heights Academy in Ferdinand, IN. She taught religious education in Ferdinand area parishes, was the Director of Religious Education at St. Francis Xavier Parish in Poseyville, IN and at Sacred Heart Parish in Schnellville, IN; and was CCD Coordinator for St. Henry Parish. With the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand, she worked in supportive services for Marian Heights Academy; and as a chauffeur, tour guide, switchboard operator, in needlework, and as a receptionist for the Hildegard Heath Center. She most recently served in prayer ministry.



Community Days!

The Sisters recently came together for Community Days, when all our members come home to the monastery to spend time as a community. This included time together for Mass and for our annual missioning, where each Sister receives her work assignment for the year. It also included a competition between the sisters, which ended in a tie that could only be settled with a fierce bout of — you guessed it — Rock Paper Scissors!



Bake Bread With Us!

Let our talented Bakery Manager, Kris Lasher, walk you through the process of baking spent grain bread. (Spent grain is a leftover from the beer brewing process.) In this video workshop, a virtual version of our popular in-person class, you'll bake two beautiful loaves of your own delicious spent grain bread. Simply register online, and you'll receive an email with a link to the video, and a PDF file of the recipe you can download. Just visit www.thedome.org and click on Events.

Building a New Community

Sister Jane Michele
and St. Theresa Place



St. Theresa Place is a new community of 14 Habitat for Humanity of Evansville homes that have been built on the former property of St. Theresa Parish and School, on the city's north side in the Diamond-Stringtown neighborhood.

If there's one thing the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand know how to do, it's build on the traditions of the past to create something new and exciting. So it makes sense that one of our own, Sister Jane Michele McClure, has been a part of St. Theresa Place in Evansville from the very beginning. For the last 18 years, she has been at Habitat for Humanity in Evansville, where she serves today as Major Gifts Officer.

When it was announced that St. Theresa's parish would be closing, Sister Jane Michele was one of about 20 committed volunteers who came together, determined that some good would come out of it.

It was their vision that the parish, which had been a home and a community to so many families for so long, would become a brand new community with 14 Habitat for Humanity homes, giving 14 families the opportunity to move forward in life and have a sound financial future.

Another driving force for St. Theresa Place was Father Ted Tempel, a beloved priest in Evansville, Indiana.

"Father Ted came to that first meeting and I'll never forget it. He said, 'Oh, 14 houses. That would be one house for every year that I've spent at St. Theresa Parish!' When Father Ted was at St. Theresa, and our Sister Jenny Miller was part of his staff, it was just a golden era."

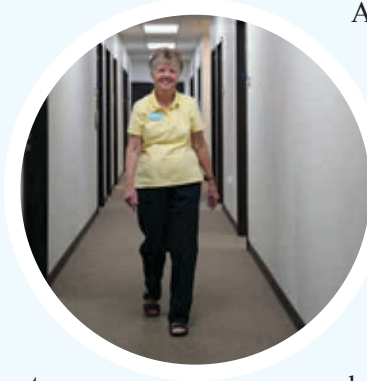
"So when Father Ted said that, I thought to myself, that deal is done. We are going to do this!"

Ground was broken for the very first house in St. Theresa Place on August 10, 2020. And in January of 2022, the keys were handed over to the 14th and final homeowner, filling up the single-family Habitat subdivision.

"You know, a lot of people really don't understand how Habitat for Humanity works," observes Sister Jane Michelle. "Everybody thinks it's a good thing. But I think there's a lot of misconceptions about it. One big one is that we give away houses. But nothing could be further from the truth."

Habitat for Humanity works with low-income families who could not get a home loan from an ordinary bank.

Habitat builds a home and sells it to the individual with a zero-percent mortgage loan. Each homeowner has to meet certain criteria, work 300+ hours (sweat equity hours) on their home and the homes of others, attend homeownership workshops and engage in Habitat's Future Homeowner Advocate program. Their loan payments are used to build new homes for others.





Sister Jane Michele works to raise money to build houses and train future homeowners for success, to gain the necessary resources to build — and to tell the story of Habitat to every conceivable audience and encourage their support, from becoming a donor to volunteering.

“The mission and vision is pretty cool,” she says, “to create a world where everyone has a decent place to live. Seeking to put God’s love in action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope.”

Anyone trying to keep up with Sister Jane Michele had better bring some good walking shoes, because she never slows down. But how did she become a Sister?

“When I was in grade school, a message that the Sisters taught me — and it just really had an impact on me — was that everyone has a vocation. Everyone has a special calling from God. And if you don’t follow that vocation, you’re going to be unhappy. And I thought, I better find out what my vocation is.”

“I felt this calling to be a Sister. I had Sisters in grade school. I had Sisters in high school at Mater Dei. And I felt, I better try this. If I don’t like it, I can leave. How free is that? So I felt like I better try it. Well, 55 years later, best decision I ever made!”

And we know at least 14 families who are glad she made it, too!

Perpetual Profession

Sister Roxanne Cassandra Higgins Makes Her Final Vows

On Saturday, September 2, with her religious community, family and friends in attendance, Sister Roxanne Cassandra Higgins made her perpetual profession with the Sisters of St. Benedict in Ferdinand. Coming to us from Kingston, Jamaica, Sister Roxanne was drawn to this community by “the balance between prayer and ministry.” We are so blessed and thankful. What a joyous day!



