

SEEKPRAYSHARE

SISTERS OF ST. BENEDICT OF FERDINAND, INDIANA

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As someone who doesn't especially care for the spotlight, this month's *Seek Pray Share* cover can feel like a bit much. But as I've learned over these last six years, being prioress means getting out of your comfort zone nearly every day, in one way or another. You'll read about some of that in this issue, along with the challenges and lessons of my term.

You'll also meet Sister Maura, who, at age 94, is facing a very serious health challenge with the sort of quiet dignity and grace that has marked her decades of service as a nurse, a chaplain, an administrator and more.

You'll read about Sister Betty's monthly trips to Paducah to provide spiritual direction — and meet all ten of our wonderful spiritual directors.

You'll see how Sister Teresa organized a mission trip to hurricane-ravaged North Carolina — and how the apartments that will be home to Benedictine Scholar House families are being manufactured.

In short, you'll see how the generosity and faithfulness of people like you is allowing us to change the world every day. From all of us, thank you.

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB
Prioress

The 2025 St. Hildegard Dinner

Celebrating our donors and our ministry with Dove House.



On Sunday, April 27, members of our St. Hildegard Society joined us at the monastery for our annual dinner, where Sister Louise Laroche talked about our long association with Dove House in Jasper, Indiana.

Dove Recovery House is a women's residential treatment program, originally founded in 2000 in Indianapolis, whose mission is to empower women to become substance free, self-sufficient, and healthy by providing safe housing and quality intensive programming.

Thanks to a Lilly Endowment Inc. grant, and support from the City of Jasper and the Dubois County Community Foundation, Dove House in Jasper opened on October 12, 2022.

The home provides a variety of programs and services including Peer Recovery Case Management, Counseling and Trauma Therapy, Financial Management, Life Skills Training, Career Readiness Classes, Intensive Outpatient Treatment, and Relapse Prevention and Aftercare.

Since opening its doors in November 2022, Dove House has served 56 women in residential services. Of those, 41 have been discharged and returned to the community.

From the outset, the Sisters of St. Benedict have been involved in this ministry as it helps the most vulnerable women in our community — who have experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, homelessness, mental health diagnoses, or substance use disorder, and women re-entering society after incarceration.

Our kitchen staff provides weekly meals for Dove House residents, and five of our Sisters (Srs. Ann Marie Howard, Jean Marie Ballard, Mary Ann Verkamp, Teresa Gunter, and Louise Laroche) deliver them — more than 1,560 deliveries so far.

But this ministry is about more than just delivering meals — or providing for what the women need. It's all about giving hope to women — hope for a new and better life for them and for their children.



*When you create a charitable gift annuity with us or remember us in your estate plan, you become a member of our **St. Hildegard Society**, named for the 12th century Benedictine abbess.*

As such, you are remembered in our daily prayers and work, and welcomed to join us on the last Sunday in April for Mass and dinner to celebrate your special connection with the Sisters.



Lessons in Leadership

Sister Anita Louise Lowe reflects on
her time as Prioress



(As you read this, the Sisters in Ferdinand are preparing to elect their next Prioress, a beautiful process steeped in prayer, discernment and tradition. In light of this, we wanted to reflect on the term currently being completed by Sister Anita Louise Lowe.)

When Sister Anita stepped into the role of Prioress for the Sisters of St. Benedict, she suspected it would be a journey of growth and grace. But even she was surprised by just how real the “grace of the office” would be.

“When a situation arises, when a question is asked, when something is needed, the grace is there to deal with it,” she reflected. “Whatever it may be.”

Her years leading the community (she was elected Prioress in 2019) have been marked by tremendous change, challenge and, ultimately, deep resilience — especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Taking on the role of Prioress is always a heavy responsibility. But for Sister Anita, it came with a once-in-a-century pandemic. COVID-19 didn’t just disrupt daily life — it reshaped everything about community living, worship and care.

“It wasn’t like, ‘Here’s the plan, here’s what we’re going to do,’” she said. “It was every week, every day, something new.”

Early on, she turned to history for wisdom, combing through the archives to see how the Sisters had weathered the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic.

She found surprisingly little — just a few newsletters mentioning that some sisters had caught “the grips” a year later.

That discovery taught her an important lesson: pandemics don’t follow a neat timeline. And neither did COVID-19 at the monastery.

From handling communion services herself when no priests could come in, to adapting funerals and liturgies on the fly, Sister Anita and her team had to create new ways to hold the community together — often overnight.

Every change was difficult, but some were deeply painful. “One of the hardest pieces was that our sisters living away from the monastery were not able to come home,” she said.



Yet creativity and technology opened new doors. With Zoom, sisters could participate in community meetings and missionings almost as fully as if they were physically present. “It wasn’t the same,” she admitted, “but it was connection. And it mattered.”

Despite the isolation, the Sisters kept their tradition, maintained since 1867, of daily prayer, broadcasting services across their in-house TV system. “Even when every sister was isolated in her room, prayer happened morning, noon and evening,” Sister Anita said. “It was unbroken, even then.”

One of the most surprising adjustments for Sister Anita was emotional. Becoming Prioress meant stepping into a leadership role among women who, the day before, had been her peers.

LEFT

On Ash Wednesday in 2021, the COVID epidemic was still raging. Sister Anita distributed ashes, and out of an abundance of caution, sprinkled ashes on each Sister rather than placing them on the forehead of each.

She recalls moments when sisters would ask her for a blessing before a major event or a trip. “It touches the heart,” she said. “And I think, did I even think to do some of that myself before? In a sense, it pulled me deeper into what it means to be Benedictine, to be part of the community.”



ABOVE

Sister Act — Sister Anita with her older sister, Teresa

RIGHT

Sister Anita and former prioress Sister Kathryn Huber unwind with gracious hosts Ted and Dana Huber at Huber Winery in Starlight, Indiana

Leading wasn’t about giving orders. It was about walking with others, about listening deeply, about making decisions that impacted real lives — sisters, staff, the broader community. She often leaned on her administrative team, the Council, and, in tough moments,

the wisdom of the prioresses who had gone before her.

And sometimes, it just meant reaching out to a prioress in another community. “Sometimes you just need to find someone and say, ‘I need to talk this out,’” she laughed. “And have them tell you, ‘No, you’re not crazy!’”

COVID hasn’t been the only major transition during Sister Anita’s term as Prioress.

There was also the difficult decision to close the Hildegard Health Center, the monastery’s licensed nursing facility.

“We knew for years that this day would come,” she said. The number of sisters needing skilled care had dwindled, and costs were rising.

“It sounds well and good,” she noted, “until you’re dealing with all of the people involved and the shift that means.”

Fortunately, thanks to past leaders’ foresight, Trilogy-owned Scenic Hills had already established a facility on the monastery property that could eventually meet the Sisters’ needs. Still, the emotional weight of change was very real. “You make the decision with your head,” Sister Anita said, “but you carry it with your heart.”

Her years also saw the beginning of several exciting initiatives, like the Benedictine Scholar House being developed on the Ivy Tech campus in Sellersburg— a collaboration with Family Scholar House to support student parents pursuing their degrees.

“It feels like closing a circle,” she said, noting her community’s deep historic connection to education. “But it’s also opening a whole new way of being connected to the future.”



Looking back, Sister Anita points to the community’s resilience as one of their greatest accomplishments. Through it all — pandemic, funerals, structural changes — the Sisters remained anchored in prayer and to each other.

Under her leadership, a planning process was undertaken to determine the best use for monastery buildings and direction for the future. That process wasn’t just about buildings and budgets.

It was about dreaming together about the future. “Too often it’s easy to plan,” she said. “But implementation is harder. We made it through to action.”

Other initiatives, like investing in a geothermal system to replace the century-old heating and air system at the monastery, showed the community’s commitment to stewardship — not just of their land and buildings, but of their Benedictine values and care for future generations.

Her term also saw a deeper collaboration with other Benedictine communities nearby. “It’s about fostering unity while maintaining our own identities,” she explained. “How can we continue to support and collaborate with each other as we move into the future?”

Some moments in Sister Anita’s journey were profoundly sacred. She vividly remembers lying prostrate during her installation ceremony, with the community singing the Litany of the Saints around her.

“I was overwhelmed with the sense that they’re all here,” she said. “Not just the saints we named — but all the sisters and all the prioresses who had gone before me.” That moment of “stepping into” her new role was both humbling and moving — a tangible passing of the torch.

Of course, there were lighter moments too — like the Halloween when she dressed up as a slice of pepperoni pizza, delivered to the community by the Subprioress dressed as a pizza delivery boy. “Everybody died laughing,” she said. “There are pictures!”

Reflecting on her own journey as Prioress, Sister Anita sees clearly how her previous roles in communications, vocations and liturgy prepared her for leadership.

Skills in writing, public speaking, journeying one-on-one with others, and deep liturgical understanding all came together for this season of service.

She believes she’s become “more intentionally prayerful” through it all — even if life still gets in the way sometimes.

Prayer, she said, is often less about formal moments and more about that constant turning toward God in the middle of life’s messiness.

Sister Anita’s story as Prioress isn’t just about navigating crises or implementing plans. It’s a story of presence — of leading not from above, but from among. “I have become who I am because of the community,” she said simply.

She often says leadership is less about setting your own schedule (nice idea!) and more about responding to whatever each day brings — with faith, with flexibility, and with an open heart.

And when she needed advice or support? She found it in her team, her prioress support group, her spiritual director — and in the quiet, powerful prayers of her community.

Walking with others through seasons of uncertainty and seasons of hope — that’s what Sister Anita’s time as Prioress has been all about. And through it all, the unbroken thread of Benedictine prayer and community life kept weaving itself beautifully, as it has for generations.



LEFT

In 2023, Sister Anita received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Brescia University



Sister Betty behind the wheel. Taking spiritual direction on the road to Paducah.

If there was such a thing as a Spiritual Directionmobile, you'd probably find Sister Betty Drewes behind the wheel. One week out of every month, Sister Betty Drewes drives nearly 200 miles to Paducah, Kentucky, to meet with a regular group of spiritual directees — something she's been doing for over a decade.



During her monthly visits, Sister Betty sees somewhere between fifteen and eighteen people at St. Thomas More Catholic Church, although her directees come from all five parishes in the Paducah Deanery, including St. Francis de Sales, St. John the Evangelist, Rosary Chapel and St. Mary Parishes.

If you're unfamiliar with spiritual direction, it simply means having someone accompany you on your spiritual journey who is trained to do so. A Spiritual Director listens to your story; then together, you listen for God's call and presence in the ordinary events of your life.

Monthly conversations are designed to deepen your relationship with God by helping you learn to recognize divine grace in all aspects of your life. Think of it as the art of listening for the movement of the Divine, but in the context of a trusting relationship.

While Spiritual Direction duties keep her busy, you can also find Sister Betty helping with retreats at the monastery in Ferdinand and providing guidance for our Oblates.

Meet Our Other Spiritual Directors

Now that you've met Sister Betty, let's introduce you to our other Spiritual Directors.

TOP ROW: Sister Gail Hamilton, Sister Susan Mary Hooks, Sister Kathryn Huber

MIDDLE ROW: Sister Karen Joseph, Sister Patricia Ann McGuire, Sister Jill Marie Reuber

BOTTOM ROW: Sister Rose Mary Rexing, Sister Rose Wildeman, Sister Jane Will

All of our Spiritual Directors have completed extensive training, are certified and adhere to the "Guidelines for Ethical Conduct" established by Spiritual Directors International.

The standard fee for spiritual direction, which is available virtually, in person at the monastery, or at other locations, is usually \$60 per session, negotiable according to need and arranged with the Director. No one will be deprived of spiritual direction for financial reasons. You can learn more at www.thedome.org.



A Path to Peace

Sister Maura waits for God
with a calm, confident heart.



In a quiet room at the monastery she has called home for decades, Sister Maura Beckman reflects with remarkable serenity on a life marked by service, compassion and, now, a deep readiness for whatever comes next.

At 94, Sister Maura lives with the knowledge that a sudden medical event—a ruptured aortic aneurysm or a transient ischemic attack (TIA)—could end her life at any moment.

Yet she faces this reality not with fear, but with the same peaceful acceptance that has shaped her decades as a nurse, hospital chaplain, and Benedictine sister. Her story is a profound testament to the way a life rooted in faith and service can prepare the heart for its final journey.

Sister Maura’s lifelong commitment to healing began early. Fresh out of a respected diploma nursing program at St. Vincent’s in Indianapolis, she was quickly thrust into responsibility.

At just 23, she was asked to care for the infirmary at her monastery, tending to elderly sisters with little more than youthful energy, nursing training, and the mentorship of an older nurse to guide her. This first baptism into the world of health-care set the tone for a career that would span decades.

She served in many roles, from hands-on nursing at the infirmary to leadership positions at hospitals, even overseeing an obstetrics department after rigorous additional training. Later, she expanded her ministry to include spiritual care, completing Clinical Pastoral Education and earning experience in gerontology to better serve the aging sisters.

Her gentle but steady presence became a constant comfort to those in fragile health, blending professional competence with a deeply compassionate heart.

It was her transition to hospital chaplaincy at Memorial Hospital in Jasper, Indiana, that Sister Maura found especially rewarding. Beginning this second career at the age of 60, she ministered to patients and families navigating the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

She spent 23 years there, bringing both her medical knowledge and her profound Benedictine spirituality into patient rooms and family waiting areas. When the hospital began incorporating hospice care, she was an early supporter, understanding deeply the need for compassionate, holistic end-of-life care.

Today, facing her own mortality, Sister Maura draws heavily from her past experiences, her Benedictine training, and her long-acquired wisdom. Last year, after a fall led to the discovery of two life-threatening aneurysms, she made the decision to forgo surgery—a choice rooted in realism and deep trust.

“I thought they could rupture at any time, or they could not rupture just like they had,” she explains matter-of-factly. “I’ll just have to deal with that.”

Rather than retreat into fear, Sister Maura chose to return to her community life, continuing her modest duties around the monastery—delivering mail, attending prayers, supporting her sisters.



“In your nineties, if you’re not comfortable with dying, it’s pretty bad. You have to be at peace with the fact that we are mortal.”



She is also receiving hospice care, a decision she approached with the same practicality she once offered to families during her chaplaincy. “Hospice is not giving up,” she insists. “It’s a way of paying attention, of being ready and of accepting help.”

Her perspective reflects the timeless wisdom of the Rule of St. Benedict, which counsels, “Keep death daily before your eyes.” Far from being morbid, this teaching invites a gentle familiarity with mortality, encouraging believers to live each moment with clarity and purpose. For Sister Maura, this Benedictine teaching has not only prepared her to face death but has enabled her to do so with extraordinary peace.



“In your nineties, if you’re not comfortable with dying, it’s pretty bad,” she says with a wry smile. “You have to be at peace with the fact that we are mortal.”

Her serene acceptance is not naive. Sister Maura has faced real suffering—fractured bones from falls, the autoimmune disorder giant cell arteritis, and the uncertainty of each day. Yet she continues forward, adapting as needed, offering gratitude for small blessings, and maintaining a humble humor about her limitations.

Even after hearing from hospice nurses that she might be “too well” to stay under hospice care, she simply smiles and says, “I can’t help that.”

There’s a quiet heroism in Sister Maura’s everyday witness—a life shaped not by grand gestures, but by the daily fidelity to care, community, prayer, and service.

As she navigates her own final chapter, she does so as she has always lived: with courage, trust and profound love for God and others.

Her story offers an inspiring vision not just for those approaching the end of life, but for anyone seeking a meaningful way to live it.

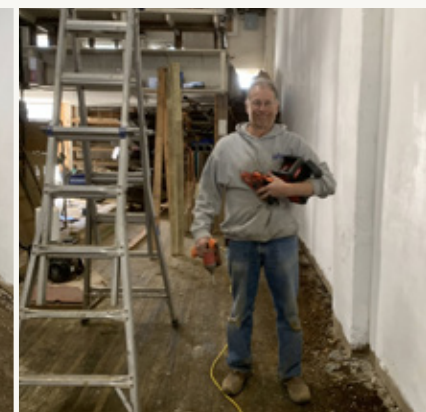
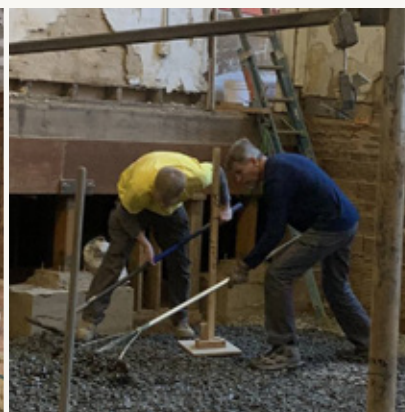
In a world that often treats aging and death as enemies to be feared and resisted, Sister Maura shows another way—a way shaped by hope, acceptance and the enduring power of faith.

“We do what we can do,” she says simply, reflecting the steady resilience that has defined her life. “And then we leave the rest to God.”



“Sister T” Takes Relief on the Road

When Hurricane Helene made landfall along the east coast last September, it left widespread devastation in its wake. The storm heavily impacted western North Carolina, with the Black Mountains region being particularly devastated, and areas like Asheville, Boone, and various mountain communities experiencing severe flooding, landslides, power outages and road closures. Our own Sister Teresa Gunter (“Sister T”) decided to help. So she gathered a group of adult and youth volunteers from Christ the King Parish in Ferdinand, where she works in youth ministry, and they headed east for a week of cleaning, repairing, rebuilding and more.



Building Futures

Three of our Sisters get a sneak peek
at the modular apartments being built
for the Benedictine Scholar House





In April, several of the Sisters had the opportunity to tour the MMY manufacturing facility in Louisville, Kentucky, where the modular apartment units that will make up the Benedictine Scholar House complex at Ivy Tech in Sellersburg are being produced.

The Sisters' guide was MMY CEO Robin Bartram-Brown — joined by Cathe Dykstra, President, CEO and Chief Possibility Officer for Family Scholar House and Family, Inc. — for a tour of this modern, expansive plant that is lean, clean and green.

The design process has been engineered to reduce waste significantly from traditional building methods. The facility itself was designed to be largely free of the dust and dirt one might expect in a manufacturing plant.

And from design to production, the units are manufactured with a 35% reduction in carbon footprint from traditional methods, all while being built to specifications that exceed local building codes — and at a pace which exceeds a typical construction project of this type.

The Sisters were excited to see this project coming to life. Be sure to watch for a ribbon-cutting later this year!

