



SEEK PRAY SHARE

SISTERS OF ST. BENEDICT OF FERDINAND, INDIANA

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Contents

FROM THE PRIORESS	01
WOMEN OF THE RULE	02
The 2025 Women of the Rule Luncheon was a great success.	
PRIORESS ELECTION	03
Sister Anita Louise Lowe will serve a second term as Prioress.	
PRIOR PRIORESSES	05
A quick look back at 13 Sisters who served as prioresses.	
OBLATE UPDATE	08
What our Oblates have been up to, and what's next.	
FINAL VOWS	09
At our monastery in Peru, Sister Maria Jesús makes final vows.	
CELEBRATING A CENTURY	11
Sisters and special guests help Sr. Mary Carmel celebrate 100 years.	
JUBILEES!	13
Thirteen of our Sisters celebrate Jubilees in 2025.	
IN MEMORIAM	13
We say goodbye to Sister Mary Leah Baehl.	
NEW CATALOG	14
The new Gift Shop catalog and one of our talented bakers.	



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As you read this issue of Seek Pray Share, one word is likely to come to mind: joy.

There was the joyful culmination of our discernment regarding the election of the prioress, and it was truly humbling to be asked by my sisters to serve a second term.

There was joy as the Women of the Rule celebrated a record amount of funding for projects and ministries of the Sisters. And joy in Peru as I visited to witness Sister Maria Jesús step fully into life as a Benedictine Sister.

Our Oblates found joy in service and fellowship. And our community gathered with great joy to help Sister Mary Carmel celebrate her 100th birthday.

So much of the time, we're distracted by the challenges and struggles in our lives. So when God blesses us with a season of joy, no matter how long or short, it is a beautiful reminder of his unending love and grace.

Know that your friendship and support is a constant source of joy and encouragement for the Sisters. May joy be yours in abundance.

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB

Sister Anita Louise Lowe, OSB
Prioress



The 2025 Women of the Rule Luncheon

Our annual Women of the Rule Luncheon at the monastery in Ferdinand on August 1 was a marvelous day where members got to spend time with one another and the Sisters.

Who are the Women of the Rule? A unique philanthropic group with a simple idea. Each member makes an annual gift of \$1,000. Sisters submit requests for funding, based on the community's needs and ministries.

The Women of the Rule review the proposals and vote on grant recipients — then celebrate with them at the awards luncheon.

This year, they voted to fund every project that was proposed! Some members generously offered to fund projects themselves with contributions above and beyond their annual donation.

Here's the list of work and ministries that will receive support from the Women of the Rule as a result:

- Women Helping Women
- Bathroom renovations at Monasterio Paz de la Cruz in Peru
- Ministry to incarcerated women
- Creation of a wildflower meadow



- Kubota snow blade, elevator upgrade, and multiple maintenance needs
- iPads for senior Sisters
- Benedictine Hospitality & Spirituality Scholarship Fund
 - Help Those in Need outreach
 - Carpet replacement
 - Vocations materials and programs
 - Oblate Community Retreat
 - Jamaica catechetical program
 - Kitchen renovation in St. Benedict Hall
 - Geothermal HVAC well sponsorship
 - Monastery Timeline and Guiding Principles wall graphics

The Women of the Rule also enjoy opportunities throughout the year to grow in faith, fellowship and connection with the Sisters and one another — including a planned summer 2026 trip to Peru to visit the Sisters' monastery, tour the ancient city of Cuzco, and experience the wonders of Machu Picchu.

If you'd like to join the Women of the Rule or just learn more, simply scan the QR code at right.



ABOVE: Sue Ellspermann, former Indiana Lieutenant Governor and retired President of Ivy Tech Community College

Pure joy.



Sister Anita Louise Lowe re-elected as Prioress.

Following several days of prayer and discernment, seriousness and solemnity turned to joy as the Sisters of St. Benedict elected Sister Anita Louise Lowe to serve a second term as prioress. Her installation ceremony took place at evening prayer on Friday, June 13.

Sister Anita's first term began in July of 2019. Her second term will be for the next four years.

The discernment process for the election of the prioress began weeks ago with the prayerful development of direction statements that would guide the Sisters of St. Benedict's priorities over the next several years.

These statements were refined, and for each statement, the Sisters identified the qualities that would be needed for a prioress to lead the community in the direction laid out in the statements.

The prayerful and deliberate discernment and election process was overseen and confirmed by Sister Jeanne Weber, president of the Monastic Congregation of St. Gertrude and a member of the Benedictines in Yankton, South Dakota.

Two other sisters served as facilitators: Sister Kimberly Porter (St. Walburg

Monastery, Villa Hills, KY) and Sister Lynn Elisabeth Meadows (Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, AL).

Originally from Louisville, Kentucky (where her baker grandfather perfected his recipe for what is now Sister Anita's Bourbon Soaked Fruitcake), Sister Anita earned a Bachelor's degree in English with a minor in French, a secondary education certification from Brescia College, and a Master's degree in Theology with a concentration in liturgical studies from the University of Notre Dame.

Before becoming prioress, Sister Anita taught English and French, served as the assistant Director of Communications, Public Relations Manager, Assistant Director of Vocations, Director of Vocations, and as Liturgist at Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand.

Sister Anita is also an accomplished harpist, and is often found filling the halls of the monastery with beautiful music. She noted that "the balance of prayer, work, and community life, as well as the down to earth quality of the sisters" is what drew her to this Benedictine community.



OPPOSITE PAGE

The Sisters joyfully surround Sister Anita Louise Lowe as she is elected to a second term as Prioress.

TOP LEFT

Sister Jeanne Weber, president of the Monastic Congregation of St. Gertrude, at the podium with Sister Anita.

BOTTOM LEFT

The re-elected prioress addresses her community.

A brief look at prior Prioresses.

Mother Benedicta Berns

Elected the first prioress in 1872 after the Ferdinand community became independent from Covington, Mother Benedicta purchased the land where the monastery stands today. She oversaw construction of St. Joseph House, a nursing home for the sick and needy, and founded schools in Ferdinand, St. Meinrad, and Rockport—often teaching herself while managing the new community. Re-elected twice, she continued teaching after her terms ended. In 1885, she returned to St. Walburg Monastery, where she died at age 86. Remembered as the community's founder, she is honored annually for her leadership in establishing Monastery Immaculate Conception.



Since 1867, only 14 Sisters of St. Benedict have served in the leadership role. Here's a quick look at Sister Anita Louise's predecessors.

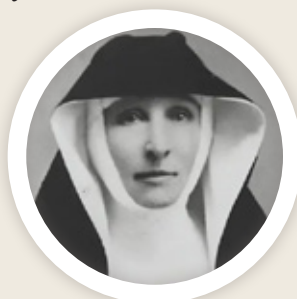
Mother Agatha Werb

Serving two terms as prioress, Mother Agatha oversaw the founding of 14 schools and sent four sisters to Arkansas to establish St. Scholastica Monastery. She guided construction of the Quadrangle and first chapel, moving the community from downtown into its new home. After a fire destroyed St. Meinrad Abbey in 1887, she offered the monks the use of the sisters' buildings. Known for wisdom and courage, Sister Agatha led during pivotal years of growth and change for the young Ferdinand community, helping secure its stability and expanding its ministry across the region.



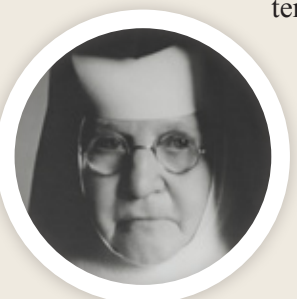
Mother Scholastica Stockman

Mother Scholastica, one of the first women to join the Ferdinand convent, served four terms as prioress between 1890 and 1914. She guided significant construction, including a barn, workmen's cottage, a new wing (now the annex), and infrastructure upgrades like electric lighting, a new kitchen, and a telephone. She also welcomed numerous donated statues that adorn the monastery today. Highly respected and deeply loved, Mother Scholastica balanced care for her sisters with strong leadership, advancing both the spiritual and practical life of the community. Her long service reflected steadfast dedication to Benedictine values.



Mother Veronica Ackerman

Prioress from 1898 to 1902, Mother Veronica had been a public school teacher before entering the community in 1882. She knew Mother Benedicta and led during the tuberculosis epidemic, introducing devotion to the Sacred Heart and beginning weekly Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. She oversaw improvements including a new slate roof and landscaping. Concerned for the sisters' spiritual welfare, she declined re-election due to health and returned to teaching, serving for 32 more years. Her leadership, though brief, strengthened the community's prayer life and deepened its devotion during a challenging time.



Mother Seraphine Kordes

Serving from 1914 to 1949, Mother Seraphine was known as a builder. She directed construction of the monastery church, St. Benedict Hall, and St. Joseph Hall, and aided St. Meinrad after its fire. She also led the community in celebrating Ferdinand's centennial in 1940, endearing herself to townspeople. Her 35-year tenure was marked by stability, growth, and deep bonds with the local community. Mother Seraphine's vision and dedication left a lasting imprint on both the monastery grounds and the hearts of those she served.

**Mother Julia Goebel**

Mother Julia served as prioress for 12 years, fostering both spiritual growth and physical expansion. She contributed to the Benedictine foundation in California and oversaw construction of Madonna Hall, Benet Hall, and Kordes Hall. After her term, she worked in development at the Academy, drove sisters to appointments, created needlework, and ministered to the infirm. A builder of both souls and spaces, Mother Julia's legacy is found in the structures she helped raise and the personal care she showed to her sisters.

**Mother Clarissa Riehl**

Principal of the Academy from 1926 to 1943, Mother Clarissa began construction of the Lourdes Grotto, Stations of the Cross, and Rosary steps. Elected prioress in 1949, she also served in leadership roles beyond Ferdinand, including Mother President of St. Gertrude's Congregation. Known for her hospitality, she directed Ladies Retreats for nearly four decades and kept close ties with alumnae and retreatants. In her later years, she lived in the infirmary, continuing her ministry of prayer and friendship. Her leadership combined spiritual devotion with a lasting care for community relationships.

**Sister Carlita Koch**

Elected prioress in 1973 at age 36, Sister Carlita was the youngest since Mother Benedicta. A former teacher and community treasurer, she led during a time of post-Vatican II renewal, encouraging spiritual growth through the Renewal and Spiritual Life Committees. She preferred being called "Sister" rather than "Mother" and oversaw constitutional updates. Her tenure expanded ministries, including service in Appalachia. Afterward, she taught Latin, worked in spirituality ministry, and researched the monastery's stained glass windows, leaving behind invaluable historical knowledge.



Sister Mary Walter Goebel

Prioress from 1981 to 1989, Sister Mary Walter held degrees in education, biology, and geology. Known for her warm hospitality, she invited former members back for prayer and friendship. She began the foundation for today's Mission Advancement program and guided the community through changes at St. Joseph's Hospital in Huntingburg. After her term, she taught at Vincennes University until her sudden death in a 1990 automobile accident. Her leadership left a legacy of welcome and outreach.



Even in retirement, she serves in the bakery, kitchen, and as a chauffeur—often spotted briskly walking the halls. Her leadership was marked by a global perspective and ongoing service.

Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau

Prioress from 2003 to 2013,

Sister Kristine Anne brought experience in teaching, music ministry, and personal development. She oversaw major projects including church renovations, licensing of the Hildegard Health Center, and founding of the



Monastery Bakery. Warm, loving, and skilled in administration, she later worked in Mission Advancement before retiring. She enjoyed traveling with friends before her passing in 2024 after a long struggle with Alzheimer's. Her legacy includes both physical improvements and a deep sense of community care.

Sister Kathryn Huber

Serving from 1989 to 1998, Sister Kathy brought a background in teaching, school leadership, and enrichment programming. As prioress, she emphasized "shared wisdom" in decision-making and embodied Benedictine hospitality. Afterward, she served nine years as Federation President, then returned to retreat work and spiritual direction. Known for warmly welcoming visitors, she often led chapel tours and prayer gatherings. Her leadership blended collaboration, faith, and the personal touch that continues to characterize the monastery's spirit.

**Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz**

Serving from 2013 to 2019,

Sister Barbara Lynn brought business expertise and a deep sense of vocation. A former comptroller, she entered the monastery at 32 and earned an MBA from Notre Dame. She served in pastoral ministry and Mission Advancement before



her election as prioress. She guided the community in finding innovative uses for its buildings and land to ensure sustainability. After serving as Community Treasurer and Director of Operations, she continues to serve in Mission Advancement, in the Women Helping Women Program, and in Monastery Service.

Sister Joella Kidwell

Prioress from 1998 to 2003, Sister Joella combined a strong academic background with experience in teaching and enrichment programming. After her term, she taught in Rome, co-led the Federation's Renewal Program, and served two terms as Federation President. She traveled widely to assist religious communities with discernment.





A busy season for our Oblates.

Our Oblates have been very busy over the past few months. On Sunday, August 5, they gathered for their annual picnic, starting a new Oblate year with good food, fun and fellowship. That was followed by an Oblate Monastic Service Fair on September 21, which showcased more than a dozen of the many beautiful and unique ways our sisters serve the community and the world. Through presentations and Q&A, Oblates learned how they can support each ministry as volunteers.

On Sunday, October 19, Oblates enjoyed a presentation on the spirituality of music from Dr. Richard Jeric. Entitled “Wound by Wonder,” it illuminated how history shapes how we listen to music; how we can relate to composers and their struggles; and the transformative power of music and spirituality.

In 2026, Oblates will meet on January 18, February 22, March 15, April 19, May 17, August 9, September 13 and October 11. At our meeting on January 17, 2027, we will install a new leadership team. Speaking of which, they recently welcomed Sr. Becky Mathauer as our new sister liaison. In the above photo of the leadership team and the oblate council are: (back row) Pat Stemle and Jim Weyer, and (front row) Lynn Belli, Shirley France, Stephanie Smith, Judy Kissel, Emily Earhart, and Sr. Becky Mathauer, OSB.

We invite you to join the Oblates as they pray the rosary via Zoom on the second Monday of the month at 7:30 PM eastern time. The Zoom link can be found on our website www.thedome.org/oblates.

(The Benedictine Oblates of Monastery Immaculate Conception are women and men who desire to spread the spirit of The Rule of St. Benedict by adopting the principles of the monastery to enrich our own lives and share those principles with others. To learn more, scan the QR code at right.)



The Last Step

Sister Maria Jesús makes her
final profession in Peru.



This past May, our prioress Sister Anita Louise Lowe, along with Sister Kathleen Marie Cash and Sister Roxanne Cassandra Higgins, traveled to Peru to celebrate with Sister Maria Jesús as she made her final profession.



St. Rita was originally built as a high school for girls from poor families in the parish. But because there were so many young women who lived in the more remote outlying areas around Morropón, St. Rita soon became a “pensionado,” or boarding school, that could accommodate fifty girls.

Maria Jesús Lopez Berru was born on July 30, 2002 in Jaguay, Santo Domingo, Peru, the daughter of Manuel Jesús Lopez and Rosa Berru de Lopez.



One of the school’s very first principals was the late Sister Mary Baehl from Ferdinand.

She began her postulancy with the Sisters of St. Benedict at Monasterio Paz de la Cruz in Morropón on March 21, 2019. She began her novitiate in March of 2020, and made her first profession on March 26, 2022.



By the 1980s, the Sisters of St. Benedict had begun accepting vocations from Peruvian sisters and established a dependent monastery in Morropón, one of six they founded in the western hemisphere.

She is currently a full-time student in Elementary Education at the University of Piura. She also supports her Benedictine community at Monasterio Paz de la Cruz and assists in vocational promotion.

Sister Maria Jesús enjoys many creative pursuits like artwork (especially drawing), playing the guitar, singing, and working in the garden.

She loves the rhythm of monastic life, and enjoys praying with her sisters and helping in all the tasks around the house.

The Sisters of St. Benedict arrived in Morropón, Peru from Ferdinand after Vatican II in the 1960s to teach at and run St. Rita High School.

Before he became Pope Leo XIV, Father

Robert Francis Prevost served in Peru from 1985 to 1986 and 1988 to 1998, during which time he became acquainted with our religious community at Monasterio Paz de la Cruz in Morropón. He’s pictured here with another of our Peruvian sisters and Sister Maria Jesús!





100!

Sister Mary Carmel Celebrates a Century!



On Saturday, August 16, the Sisters of St. Benedict gathered to celebrate a joyful milestone: the 100th birthday of Sister Mary Carmel Spayd.

Born and raised in Mariah Hill, Indiana, Sister Mary Carmel entered Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand on September 8, 1944, with her twin sister, the late Sister Mary Carmen.

The two were known for their shared devotion to God — and their love of swing dancing, which nearly delayed their vocations! “It was the hardest thing to give up,” Sister Mary Carmel recalled.

Sister Mary Carmel made her perpetual profession on June 6, 1949. She earned a Bachelor’s degree from St. Benedict College and a Master’s in Business Administration from Notre Dame.

She spent decades in education, first teaching elementary students at Christ the King, then serving

as a beloved teacher and principal at Mater Dei High School, both in Evansville.

“The Benedictine community fosters personal growth,” she said. “I never felt stifled in any way. The community offered me opportunities I would not have had otherwise.”



Those opportunities included pouring concrete for monastery walkways, climbing scaffolding to the top of the church dome in her late 70s, and living a life of service grounded in prayer and joy.

If you wish to acknowledge Sister Mary Carmel’s birthday and her remarkable life of service by making a gift to support the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in her honor, you can quickly and easily do that online by scanning the QR code below, and she will receive a message that someone has honored her in this fashion.

Left: Deacon Dan Niemeier, President, Mater Dei High School represents the Mater Dei community at Sister Mary Carmel’s 100th birthday celebration.

Top: Sisters who were students and/or teachers at Mater Dei. Sister Mary Carmel taught at Mater Dei from 1962 until 1966, and served as principal from 1967 until 1981.

Above: Sister Mary Carmel at her 25th jubilee.





Celebrating our Jubilarians.

This year, we're celebrating the Jubilees of thirteen Sisters who have reached major milestones in their lives as Benedictines. L to R: (seated) the late Sr. Mary Leah Baehl (75 years - see obituary below); Sr. Mary André Gettelfinger, Sr. Barbara C. Schmitz, Sr. Jacqueline Kissel, Sr. Mary Beth Maier, Sr. Michelle Mohr (70 years); Sr. Jane Becker, Sr. Agnes Weinzapfel, Sr. Donna Marie Herr (60 years); Sr. Sarah Cathleen Yungwirth, Sr. Celeste Boda, Sr. Robin Lynn Evans (25 years). (Not pictured, Sr. Teresa Elizabeth Stutz, 25 years.)

In Memoriam

Sister Mary Leah Baehl died on Wednesday, June 18, 2025, at Scenic Hills at the Monastery in Ferdinand. She was born Ruth Ann Baehl on July 27, 1931 in Evansville, IN, the oldest of nine children of Leroy G. Baehl and Cecilia C. (Schaefer) Baehl. She entered the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand in 1948 from St. Bernard Parish and made her monastic vows in 1950.



Sister Mary Leah earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education from St. Benedict College and a Master's degree in Elementary Education, with a minor in Reading, from Indiana State University. She taught elementary students across Indiana at St. Joseph School, St. Theresa School and Christ the King School in Evansville; Assumption School in Indianapolis; St. Mary School in Huntingburg; Schnellville Elementary School; Mariah Hill Elementary School; and Ireland Elementary School.

She also taught for over a decade at St. Rita School in Morropón, Peru, and served in missions work at Monasterio Paz de la Cruz and La Parroquia de San Isidro, also in Peru. At the monastery in Ferdinand, she served as an Infirmary Aide, helped distribute altar breads, and most recently served in prayer ministry.

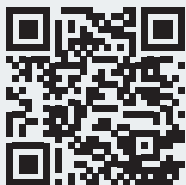
New catalog!

One of the most delightful ways you can support the ministries of the Sisters is by making purchases from our newest Monastery Gift Shop gift catalog, which recently hit mailboxes.

Its 32 pages are packed with lots of gourmet deliciousness from the Sisters' bakery, as well as artwork by the Sisters, other monastery made products from coffee to soaps and scrubs, and much more.

Whether you're buying gifts for everyone on your Christmas list, or just doing a little self-care, you'll find plenty of ideas in this season's catalog. Didn't find it in your mailbox? Just scan the QR code below with your phone to view it.

Happy shopping!



Gianna's Flour Power!

The Sisters have a talented team working every day in our bakery, whipping up all the delicious gourmet treats available through the Monastery Gift Shop. And one of the newest is Gianna Wagner. Gianna grew up in Celestine, Indiana — about 15 miles north of Ferdinand — one of nine siblings! So, like many of our Sisters, she knows what it's like to grow up in a big family, and she really enjoys being around other people.

Gianna actually started out working in the monastery kitchen part-time during her senior year of high school. Fast forward, and a Facebook post from the Sisters caught her eye, promoting an open position in the bakery. "Hey, I've been there before," she thought, "so why not come back? It was nice seeing familiar faces coming back day to day."

And days at the bakery are always busy. Gianna might come in and help another baker with whatever she's making in the morning, or if she's baking that day, she'll jump right in, get all the ingredients measured out and keep those ovens busy!

"I really enjoy it," Gianna says with a big smile. "It's a really fun job. I love working with the sisters. They're all very nice, and they just bring a peaceful vibe. They're all just so welcoming and kind."



