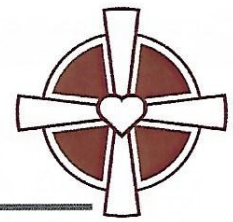


# The Gleaner



An occasional newsletter of the Federation of St. Gertrude

Number 68 ♦ April 2018

## Message from the President by Sr. Jeanne Weber

In this and succeeding issues of *The Gleaner*, we will be hearing stories of our sister monastic communities as they plan for their futures as smaller and older communities. This is a trajectory that, in reality, began in the 60's and 70's as we started to let go of ministries in response to decreasing numbers of sisters. It continued in the 80's, 90's and 2000's as many of us undertook renovation or building plans that considerably downsized our living space. Now some are becoming aware that their communities can no longer sustain and nurture new membership. They are making plans for leadership as they realize they do not have another sister who can be prioress. They are looking at where they will live and how they will be cared for as they "come to completion." And they are attending to how the legacy of their lives and work among the people of God will live on when they are no more.

These are challenging times for our monastic communities. All of us are called to grapple with these issues in one way or another. And as we do so, the temptation can be to lose hope—to equate letting go of our ministries, of the hope for new membership, of our generational monastic home, with failure. Yet the Paschal Mystery teaches us that death is not failure. "Unless the grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain of wheat. But if it dies, it bears much fruit" (Jn 12:24). We share these stories, not to discourage but to encourage. None of us is alone in coming to grips with becoming older and frailer as a community. Each community and each member are called together to take a "long, loving look at the real."

As part of our recent meeting, the Federation Council read and discussed an interview with Sandra Schneiders, *Religious Life as a Resurrection Phenomenon*, published in the Winter 2018 issue of LCWR's *Occasional Papers*. If you have not yet read this article, I would recommend it. One insight I gained from the article is that we are called to enter into the Paschal Mystery not only individually, but also corporately. In this vein, Sandra states:

If we understood our life, individually, corporately, and institutionally as participation in the Paschal Mystery culminating in the Resurrection of the body at the heart of the church and for the salvation of the world, then loss of life, individually or corporately or in terms of our participation in certain ministries, while painful and even deeply sorrowful, as was Jesus' passion and death . . . would not be seen as tragic, destructive or hopelessly anguished (25).

Schneiders assures that while the grief we experience is real, we must not grieve as if there were no hope (1 Thess 4:13). She asserts that anxiety and hopelessness around the losses we are suffering result from our over-identification with the external markers of religious life—numbers, institutions, ministerial works, and so on—that grew so exponentially in the first half of the last century. She labels this over-identification with the institutional manifestations of religious life as form of a "worldliness" that is antithetical to our reason for being, which she defines as living the Resurrection in this life (26).

When Jesus was crucified, his disciples were violently stripped of their hope in a Messiah who would be a worldly king and a conquering hero. This was a necessary pre-condition for their being able to experience the Risen Christ as he appeared to them in his transformed body, and in the gathered community and the breaking of the bread. We too are called to let go of the marks and hopes of worldly success in our monastic lives to embrace the dying that is asked of us. Dying is not a sign of failure. It is a characteristic of all created life. How new life may come to be from our dying we cannot yet see. We are called to trust in the One who went before us, whose spirit lives in us, and whose promise to us is, "Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:20).



### President's Schedule

- ◇ April 16-20: Pre-election visit, Fort Smith
- ◇ April 30-May 3: Meeting of Benedictine Presidents, Washington, D.C.
- ◇ May 8-11: Federation Finance Committee, Watertown
- ◇ June 4-9: Visitation, Yankton (Sr. Shawn Carruth)
- ◇ June 13-19: Federation of St. Scholastica Chapter, Cullman
- ◇ June 26-30: Pastoral visit, Nanaimo
- ◇ July 20-25: Federation of St. Benedict Chapter, Bismarck
- ◇ August 6-11: LCWR National Assembly, St. Louis
- ◇ August 30-September 14: CIB Symposium, Rome
- ◇ September 14-22: Maria Rickenbach and Sarnen

### 55 and Under

The next 55 & Under gathering will be held at Benedict Inn (Our Lady of Grace Monastery) in Beech Grove, Indiana, March 8-11, 2019. The planning committee for the event includes: Belinda Monahan (Federation of St. Scholastica), Chair, Lisa Mauer (Federation of St. Benedict), Susan Reuber (Federation of St. Gertrude), Maria Victoria Cutaia, (Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration) and Fidelis Marie Lanowich (Missionary Benedictine Sisters). For those sisters 55 and under, mark your calendars for a fun weekend renewing your friendships with Benedictines across the country!

### To log into the Federation website

[www.federationofstgertrude.org](http://www.federationofstgertrude.org)

In the middle of the home page, you'll see a box that says "Login for Federation Members." Click this button and enter this information:

User name: fedmember Password: Gertrude2013

You can now click on "Member Files" to access the directory, other Federation documents, and past issues of *The Gleaner*

### Archives Conference Offered

A conference titled *Envisioning the Future of Catholic Religious Archives* is being hosted at Boston College in July 11-13. It is for leaders and archivists of religious communities. The goal is to create an audience that will be able to discuss their own archives with an eye to the future. If you are interested in attending, you would need to fill out an application of interest (see website—below). When the applications have been reviewed, a committee will respond with who has been accepted to participate.



The conference is being heavily subsidized by Boston College in order to keep the registration price low – \$250 includes the program, housing, everything! You would need to pay your own transportation. Please also let me know if you are interested in attending. Website: <https://catholicarchives.bc.edu/>



Members of the Federation Council at our March meeting in Rapid City. If we look like we're ready to play, it's because we were. L-R: Teresa Jackson, Cottonwood, Jeanne Weber, Yankton, Barbara Lynn Schmitz, Ferdinand, Mary Coswin, Winnipeg, Shawn Carruth, Crookston, Mildred Busch (recording secretary), Yankton, Mary Luke Jones, Beech Grove.





## Queen of Angels Monastery, Mt Angel, OR

### Transfer of Ministry

In December of 2017, during Vespers in the Queen of Angels Monastery Chapel, we celebrated the official transfer of St. Joseph Shelter, Mission Benedict and Casa Adele to Catholic Community Services of the Mid-Willamette Valley. The ministry was initiated by the Benedictine Sisters in 1988 in response to a need for housing and food for migrant workers. Casa Adele (dedicated in honor of S. Adele Marie) was begun to meet the need for farm worker housing. St. Joseph Shelter continues today, as one of the only places for families and children in this area to come and stay until they regain the ability to be independent, securing employment and stable housing. Catholic Community Services is the perfect partner for this continuing ministry. They have served the mid-Willamette Valley in Oregon for 80 years. They have a special emphasis on children and families with disabilities, which is a very underserved population. They also are dedicated to young people aging out of foster care at 18 and being stranded without the maturity to face life. They follow these children until they turn 26, are able to make solid decisions, and have the life skills to live and benefit themselves and society. The mission of CCS continues and expands the Benedictine Sisters' commitment to education, health care and commitment to the immigrant and poor in our area.

The Benedictine Sisters, in partnership with St. Mary Parish, Mt Angel and Mt. Angel Abbey continue to support the fundraising/fundraising efforts of this critical ministry. Sisters also volunteer time in support of these wonderful families. This is



Top: Transfer ritual for St. Joseph Shelter

Left: Sister Rocio and Angela at shelter





### St. Scholastica Monastery, Fort Smith, AR

In January 2013, the Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas had the opportunity to partner with the Benedictine Abbey of Jesus Christ Crucified in Esquipulas, Guatemala to provide scholarships to promising students at their K-12 college preparatory school, Colegio San Benito. The Sisters began the collaboration by providing scholarships to 5 students and serving as a channel for other donations.

Today, the program focuses exclusively on girls' education. (Boys who had been receiving scholarships now have them from the Abbey.) As of now, there are 35 girls on scholarship, some from the local Franciscan orphanage and others from single-parent homes.



- ◆ Several organizations joined the partnership: Subiaco Abbey, Oblates, and Academy; Sacred Heart Church, Charleston; Christ the King and St. Boniface schools; and Trinity Junior High School Spanish classes.
- ◆ Each year volunteers have staffed 2-week educational summer camps focused on English, the arts, and leadership.
- ◆ Teens and adults from Sacred Heart Church have made 3 spring break trips in 2013, 2015, and 2017.
- ◆ Three scholarship students have graduated from high school. One is in her third year of medical school, and two are attending university part time while working.
- ◆ A "Future Nurses Club of Guatemala" has been started. One of our students has recently won a scholarship to attend nursing school.



- ◆ Several appliance-size boxes of clothing and small gifts are sent to the orphanage each year.
- ◆ Every scholarship student has a Sister or Oblate Prayer Partner.

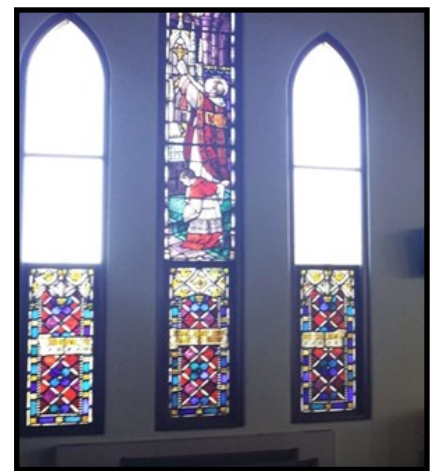
At our fundraising dinner on Feb. 3, Father Jerome Kodell , former Abbot of Subiaco Abbey, said, "The Sisters of St. Scholastica are doing something very special for the girls in Esquipulas. They are not simply giving them some more options for their life. Those girls have no options.....I am very proud of the Sisters for looking beyond themselves and even to a different country, Guatemala, and to a different culture. The Sisters are saving lives. They are doing something for us, too.



The sisters of St. Scholastica are also in the midst of a building project for a new monastery. They have been in the planning phase of this project for several years, having determined that their current building is too large and too difficult and costly to renovate. Their plans are to be able to make the move to their new monastery sometime this summer. Once they are settled, they will



discern the future of their current monastery building. The pictures include the architect's rendering of the completed building, a recent construction photograph, and portions of windows from the current chapel that have been removed to be incorporated into the new chapel. If you are interested, the sisters have done a wonderful job of chronicling the construction in words and pictures on their website: <https://stscho.org/>



### Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Crookston, MN

Between 2012 and 2017 we at Mount St. Benedict in Crookston took a serious look at our reality with regard to whether or not we could continue to recruit and form new members. Then in January 2017 our Chapter made the decision to discontinue our recruitment and formation programs. It was not a decision made without consideration of multiple aspects of our reality nor was it made without considerable reflection and prayer.



The first step, taken in 2012, was a review of our Call to Conversion document in Listen III. We found that document needed updating and revision and we understood the fact that a good formation program needed trained and skilled members of a Formation Team and that the community itself has an indispensable





role in strong formation of new members. We asked ourselves if we had the necessary personnel and if we had members who would be willing and able to participate in a program of training. We also asked ourselves some questions about who we are as a community and considered our strengths. After a day of Chapter discernment in 2013, we did decide to go ahead with recruitment of new members.

By 2017 we were ready to face more reality, however. Two women who had been in temporary profession when we began considering our questions about recruitment and formation had left the community and a third who'd been accepted for postulancy in 2015 did not respond to our letter of acceptance. The last new member whom we received and who stayed had made temporary profession in 1995. As one sister put it, "Women aren't knocking down our doors to get in." Our numbers had continued to decline. At the beginning of 2017 our ages ranged from 67-101 with most sisters in their 80s. We decided to bring to Chapter the question about receiving new members again. We spent Advent of 2016 in personal reflection on pertinent articles from *Horizon* and *LCWR Occasional Papers*. We also encouraged personal reflection on these questions: Can we get in touch with our own culture? What would make it difficult to bring new members into that? Who are we as a monastic community at this time? What do we care about? What are our gifts/strengths? What does this say about recruiting and forming new members? Then in a spirit of prayer, reflection, and deep listening we shared with one another the fruit of our prayer and reflection. The vote to discontinue recruiting new members was a clear indication of the prayer and reflection that preceded it.



Of course, this decision comes with its own pain. Yet it carries gifts for our present reality. We are freer, I think, to devote the necessary energy to living in kindness and generosity to one another without the worry of whether new members will come or whether there must be something else we could do to encourage new members to join us. We know now that we, as a community are moving to completion. We "keep death daily before our eyes" not only in terms of our individual deaths but in terms of the passing of this particular monastery. We reflect with gratitude and not a little amazement on the gifts God has given us in our nearly 100 years in this place. We trust that the wisdom of God has always guided us and that the grace of God is what has always energized us. These gifts continue in who we are today and in what we hand on to others as our legacy and our future.



## The Conference of Benedictine Prioresses



The Conference of Benedictine Prioresses met February 1-7 at Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL. Thirty-nine prioresses from the three federations and the Missionary Benedictines attended, along with the three federation presidents, and the prioress-general of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. The days were full ones with several reports and other items of business.



Among the business items, representatives were chosen to attend the CIB (*Communio Internationalis Benedictarum*) symposium which is held every 4<sup>th</sup> year at San Anselmo in Rome. We have two delegates from the United States on the CIB, Sr. Jennifer Mechtild Horner of Beech Grove and Sr. Lynn McKenzie of Cullman. The federation presidents and the prioress-general from Clyde also attend the symposium. Additionally, four other prioresses and one sister who is under 50 were chosen to attend. Sr. Terri Hoffman of Watertown will attend from our federation. Because Sr. Jeanne Weber is going as a member of the planning team, Sr. Mary Coswin of Winnipeg, a member of the federation council, will represent the Federation of St. Gertrude in her stead. Hannah Vanorny from Bismarck was chosen as the young member.

One afternoon of the meeting is given to federation meetings. The prioresses of our federation shared with each other the ways in which they are planning for their futures as smaller and older communities. Look for many of these accounts in this and upcoming editions of *The Gleaner*.





One afternoon we had talks on archives by Malachy McCarthy (a former Benedictine and currently archivist for the Claretian Brothers), and Ephrem Hollerman from St. Ben's. Malachy's talk was an overview on monastic archives as expressions of our charism and mission. Ephrem brought his words home by describing how important archival information was to her in the research for her 1994 book--*The Shaping of a Tradition*. Discussion after the talks focused on archives as a part of the historical legacy of our monastic communities, along with their value to researchers from a variety of disciplines.

Two days were devoted to a workshop titled "Fully Human, Fully Alive" by John Picciano, a social worker and addiction counselor. He outlined the stages of psychological/emotional development and the psychological effects when infants and children don't receive what they need at any of these stages. He very strongly grounded defensive behaviors and addictions in those unmet needs and in the anxiety that results from that experience. His perspective was one of profound compassion. Over and over again he repeated that people don't choose to become addicts and stressed the unconscious nature of defensive and dysfunctional behavior.

The Cullman sisters went all out to welcome us. They chose a Mardi Gras theme for the decor. On the last evening, they hosted a lovely Mardi Gras dinner for us in their dining room, followed by a dance with a live jazz band in the retreat center dining room. We found out that several of the sisters, including Maria de Angeli are quite the dancers!

