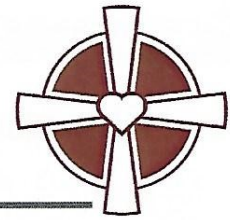


The Gleaner



An occasional newsletter of the Federation of St. Gertrude

Number 67 ♦ November 2017

Message from the President

by Sr. Jeanne Weber

The month of November, as fall begins to fade into winter, is significant as a time to commemorate the saints who have gone before us, those of our communities and families, as well as from the broader church and world. In our monastic communities, we have many rich traditions surrounding the death of our sisters, from keeping vigil with them as they are dying, through our wake and funeral rituals, to the ways in which we keep their memory alive as the years pass by. In this edition of the Gleaner, we share the customs of many of our federation houses.

I would like to thank each of you for your support and prayers as I take on this new ministry. I ended the autobiographical information that I wrote for you in preparation for the chapter by acknowledging that the position would stretch me beyond my personal comfort zone. It has done so already in these weeks of setting up the office, going through files, and learning the ropes (especially the financial ropes). I am learning to be okay with not knowing, with ambiguity, and with the unfinished nature of things. My only certainty (besides the awareness that God is in all things) is that there will be more uncertainty, ambiguity and unfinishedness in the months and years ahead. One of the blessings of beginning in this particular year is the light schedule of elections and visitations, which is enabling me to get my feet a little more firmly planted. I have enjoyed spending time in the communities that I have been able to visit thus far, and have been pleasantly surprised that I'm enjoying the travel.

We had the first meeting of the newly minted Federation Council in Ferdinand, October 17-21. Sr. Jane Becker of Ferdinand facilitated our getting to each other. We also spent generous time considering how to give flesh and life to the direction statements set by the Chapter in June. The Ferdinand community was tremendously gracious. The last evening we got in on their annual employee picnic. This was held in their event center with good companionship, food, and some great locally made brew from the brewery next door!

As some of you are aware, the Federation Chapter settled on three statements of direction to guide us into the future. They are as follows:

1. We commit ourselves to face reality and make courageous decisions for our future.
2. We commit ourselves to collaborate as we develop and share best practices that address our current realities and critical challenges.
3. We commit ourselves to seek God (mystical) and serve God's people (prophetic) in practices that witness Benedictine monastic life to the world.



Federation Council L-R: Srs. Barbara Lynn Schmitz, Mary Luke Jones, Teresa Jackson, Jeanne Weber, Mary Coswin, and Shawn Carruth

We will be using the Gleaner as one way of encouraging us to enliven these goals in our lives. For this edition, I'd like to share a brief quote from Etty Hillesum, which speaks to the third direction statement. She asserts that "Ultimately we have just one moral duty: to reclaim large areas of peace in ourselves, more and more peace and to reflect it towards others. And the more peace there is in us, the more peace there will also be in our troubled world (*An Interrupted Life: The Diaries of Etty Hillesum, 1941-43* p. 229). I hear Etty's words, written in a concentration camp, as a call to a deep and abiding trust in the love and care of God for us, in whatever we are going through. Let us allow ourselves the time and space to become absorbed in *lectio divina* and in that deep prayer of quiet which creates in us the peace that only God can give. May that peace be our grounding as take a long, loving look at the real in our monastic communities and the woundedness of our larger culture, witnessing God's love in the midst of our troubled world.



President's Schedule

January 14-24, 2018

CIB planning meeting, Rome

January 31-February 7, 2018

CBP meeting, Cullman

March 1-5, 2018

Election of Prioress, Madison

March 18-23, 2018

Board meeting and visit, Mount Angel

To log into the Federation website

www.federationofstgertrude.org

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

User name: fedmember Password: Gertrude 2013

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



The 2017 Federation Chapter was held in Yankton, SD, June 22-28, 2017. Participants from left to right: 1st row: Sisters Patti Koehler, Kathy DiVaio, Paula Larson, Joella Kidwell, Mary Forman, Julianne Babcock, Celeste Boda, Anita Louise Lowe, Mary Wegher, Mary Carol Kinghorn, Maribeth Wentzlauff. Second Row: Sisters Mary Coswin, Carol Kovarik, Elise Forst, Barbara Rinehart, Filomena Silva, Ramona Fallon, Phoebe Schwartz, Dawn Annette Mills, Shawn Carruth. Third Row: Sisters Susan Marie Lindstrom, Eileen Schepers, Kathy Curtis, Barbara Lynn Schmitz, Mary Luke Jones, Yvette Mallow, Maria Goretti DeAngeli. Fourth Row: Sisters Virginia Evard, Marietta Schindler, Denette Leifeld, Terri Hoffman, Nancy Zemcuznikov, Kathleen McGeary. Fifth Row: Sisters Jeanne Weber, Lynn Smith, Jennifer Mechtild Horner, Lynn Marie McKenzie, Dorothy Jean Beyer, Pat Bolling, Myra Schmeig, Jacquelyn Ernster, Kim Marie Jordan, Janet Marie Barnard, Carmella Luke



Federation Chapter Photos

Left: Sr. Joella installs Sr. Jeanne Weber as 11th President of the Federation of St. Gertrude. Top: Sr. Jeanne blesses the newly elected Federation Council Members.



Surrounded by Love, Never Forgotten: Monastic Rituals of Remembering

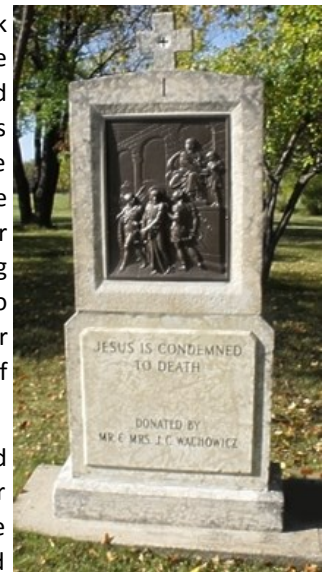
St. Benedict's Monastery, Winnipeg



Recently, we the Sisters of St. Benedict in Winnipeg concluded the sale of some of our excess land, specifically the acres along Main Street and part of the riverbank property. The Monastery, Retreat and Conference Centre and Seniors' Residence are intact and we continue to welcome groups for retreats and workshops of all kinds and to extend hospitality to our residents. A wooded area is reserved near the Centre and some acres along the riverbank for walking.

The path to the riverbank passes through the cemetery park area, part of which is shown above. Here we memorialize our sisters who have gone before us. The Calvary scene and the remains of 15 deceased sisters were moved from "God's Acre," the cemetery in Arborg, MB, to Winnipeg in the Spring of 1963 together with the Stations of the Cross. In the year 2000 when we renovated our chapel, the granite altar top was placed under the Calvary scene fittingly expressing our communion in Christ. Special memorials for the two founding members, Mother Veronica Zygmanki and Sister Candida Jakubik, were prominently placed on either side of the Calvary scene.

The Stations of the Cross have quite a history of rising and falling. They were erected in "God's Acre" in November of 1918 and solemnly blessed in September of 1927. When they were moved to Winnipeg in 1963 another solemn blessing took place. At an age of 100 years these stations, even with their beautiful cast iron bas relief still in good shape, need some refurbishing. When they have been restored they will be reconfigured in the cemetery plot.



St. Scholastica Monastery, Fort Smith

When the sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas broke ground for their new monastery on May 10th, they added soil from their motherhouse in Ferdinand, IN; their first Arkansas monastery in Shoal Creek; their current monastery; and the monastery cemetery. The sisters' foremothers, who had mentored and inspired them in life and who had laid the foundation for the present, are still an integral part of their community, having made the transition from earth to the Communion of Saints in heaven.



St. Scholastica, cont.

When Our Lady of Peace Monastery, St. Scholastica's daughter house in Columbia, MO, was dissolved in 2010, the sisters welcomed not only four living sisters but also the remains of four sisters who had made their professions in Fort Smith prior to the establishment of Our Lady of Peace in 1969. At St. Scholastica, death doesn't sever the bonds of community.

When a sister is near death, she is gently tended and accompanied in her final hours by the sisters with whom she shared her life, and by family members who come to be by her side. As much as possible, Sisters stay to hold the dying member's hand, pray, and witness the sacred transition into eternal life that is the final destination of all humankind.

When death is near, all the sisters gather in the dying member's room and recite the Prayers for the Dying, accompanied by their chaplain, Fr. Les Farley. Afterwards, each sister and guest—employees, friends, and family members—pass by the dying member's bedside, offering gestures of love and comfort.

On the evening before a sister's funeral, her body is brought to the rotunda of the monastery, near the doorway through which postulants walk when joining the community. Everyone gathers as the prioress greets the body. A white cloth, symbolizing the baptismal garment, is placed over the casket. A green wreath is placed on the casket symbolizing eternal life, along



with the Rule of St. Benedict. Led by a sister bearing a lighted candle, the community processes into chapel to begin Vespers for the Dead.

During Vespers, the prayers of the faithful become prayers of gratitude for the gift of the deceased sister's life, service, goodness, and special gifts and talents. At the end of Vespers, everyone passes by the casket to say goodbye and bless the deceased with holy water.

Later, in the dining hall, family, friends, and sisters enjoy punch and cookies while sharing memories of the deceased's life. A commemorative video is made for the family and community as a cherished keepsake. A table is set up with pictures from the sister's life and some of her favorite things.

The funeral Mass is generally held at 10:30 a.m. the next morning, after the sisters have prayed Vespers for the Dead as their morning prayer. Following Mass, they walk through the rotunda door to the nearby cemetery and a final farewell is said while family, friends and the community bless the casket with holy water and commend their sister to the earth.

In the past eighteen months, nine community members took up residence in Chapel Ridge Nursing Home, two blocks from the monastery, and two of the nine sisters have passed away. The sisters have taken special efforts to insure that the infirm sisters remain an integral part of the community, both on an everyday basis and in a sister's transition to eternity.

When a Sister dies, her picture and a vase of flowers are placed on the serving line for 30 days, and she is prayed for daily at Mass and Liturgy of the Hours. Sisters are also prayed for on their death anniversaries.

St. Scholastica's foremothers and wisdom women continue to inspire and guide them as they deal with the challenges of construction, downsizing, and moving to a new home in 2018.



Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton



At Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, when a sister has died, in addition to tolling the bells, we remember her with at the next hour of the Liturgy of the Hours by praying special prayer and singing the *Lux Aeterna*.

At the wake, after the procession into the church with the casket, we read verses 49 and 50 of the Prologue of the Rule, before placing a copy of the Rule on the casket. This is followed by placing the document of the sister's first profession on the casket, along with the following: "On ___ Sr. ___ professed to live the monastic way of life under the Rule of St. Benedict. As she has faithfully observed the teaching of Christ until death, and through patience shared in his sufferings, may she also merit a share in his kingdom."

We have also developed a meaningful commemoration of the sisters who have died in the past year, which we pray the Saturday Evening of our June Chapter meetings. The prayer begins in the Chapter Room, with the hymn, psalms and reading for Vespers. After the reading, a slide show of pictures of each sister, spanning as much of her monastic life as possible, is shown. The slide show is accompanied by a brief script, describing the sister's life and the manner of her death. When the slides and script for each sister are finished, someone who was close to her in life brings a long stemmed rose to the front and places it in an empty vase, then lights a candle for her from the Paschal Candle. As she returns to her place, the *Suscipe* is sung. After this ritual has been completed for the last sister, the community stands and is led in gesturing the *Suscipe* as they sing it one last time. We then process to the cemetery, carrying baskets of flower petals, for a blessing of the graves by the prioress. After prayer and sprinkling of the cemetery with holy water, the sisters scatter flower petals on the graves throughout the cemetery. This is meaningful to the sisters, and creates a lovely effect that passers-by remark on when the weather is such that the petals remain on the graves for a day or so.

Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove

Depending upon the nature of the illness leading to death and if at all possible, the community gathers around the bed of the sister to sing hymns and pray psalms. We each say our final goodbye with a blessing and/or a kiss and a word of encouragement.

The wake service, attended by sisters, family and friends, is typically one of sharing joy-filled memories and is done in the context of Evening Prayer. Since so many of our sisters pass away after a long and productive life, sadness is balanced with amusing stories and happy remembrances.

Just recently, the community completed paperwork indicating a sister's wish for traditional burial, cremation or the donation of her body to science (leading to cremation in 18 months). Either way, a Mass of Christian burial is held in the monastery chapel but begins with the community filing by the remains to offer a final personal prayer of commendation.

The prioress removes the sister's ring, glasses, rosary and her vow paper and closes the casket, which has been open for the viewing in the monastery chapel.

Sister pallbearers guide the casket to the cemetery while the community sings the litany of the saints that ends with the names of the deceased sisters of Our Lady of Grace. The bells toll the number of years the deceased was vowed.

Following the blessing at the gravesite, the mourners are invited to the monastery dining room for a meal. For 30 days, the sister's picture is displayed at the foot of Our Lady of Grace and she is, of course, mentioned at Evening Prayer as is every Federation member we are remembering in prayer.

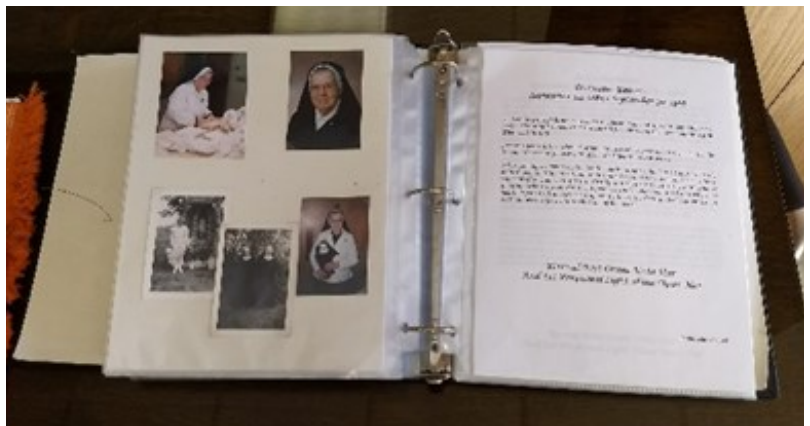




Sacred Heart Monastery, Richardton, ND

Dying or passing over is a unique experience for the sister and for us who remain. If at all possible we like to be with the sister in her final days and hours assuring her of our support. Some have died suddenly with no warning. We use all the traditional prayers of the church plus spontaneous prayer and song.

After death the sister's body goes to the local funeral home. It is our practice that the prioress and subprioress go to the funeral home when the embalming is complete. We assist with the dressing of the body and make other arrangements. Then the sister is brought back to the monastery for a private reception of the body by our whole community. The prayers here are the ones used by the Church and include placing the pall, sprinkling with holy water, and incensing. Then we process to the chapel where she lies in state until the time of the funeral.



At the beginning of the funeral Mass the prioress and the presiding priest walk in together. The presider goes to his chair. The prioress goes to the coffin and removes the sister's profession ring, and then begins the process of closing the coffin. After the coffin is closed, the prioress asks the congregation to stand for the opening song. At the end of Mass we process to our cemetery which is not too far away, singing songs. At the cemetery the prioress and the presider share the burial prayers. Then we ask everyone present to sprinkle the coffin with holy water if they so wish. Those who wish to stay for the lowering of the coffin into the vault are invited to remain while others proceed to our dining room. The food served at the funeral luncheon is usually something the deceased sister had liked.

Following the death of a sister, we remember her with a special prayer for 30 days, three times a day, at the refectory table. The place setting consists of a cross candle, and pictures of her. The prayers are the traditional church prayers. Then yearly thereafter the sister is remembered on the anniversary date of death with the same place setting, and one of the sisters reads a brief history of her life. We maintain a book of the history of all the deceased sisters with a page of pictures. For some of our pioneers we have only one picture.

On Memorial Day we all go to our cemetery for midday prayer, a special one, and pray for each deceased sisters, sprinkle her grave with holy water, and incense the grave. On All Souls Day the remembrance of the deceased is done in chapel by recitation of their names and prayer.

Ten of our sisters are buried in our former cemetery in Minot, ND. This includes our foundress. However at our Richardton cemetery we have a memorial headstone for everyone. Both cemeteries are maintained and beautiful.

Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand

When a sister is in her final illness, we will post sign-up sheets so that a sister is staying with her. This is a way to pray for the sister and to keep a quiet vigil with her. At the time of death, as many sisters as are able will gather in the room to pray and to sing the Suscipe. The prioress, if possible, leads the prayers at the time of death. Then, at the next public prayer time (Morning or Evening Prayer), we will toll the bell and say a special prayer for the departed sister.

Each year on the anniversary of her death, we commemorate the sister at Evening Prayer, stating when she entered, from what town, and the year of her death. Also, each year we hold a Vespers





Ferdinand, cont.

of Remembrance for those sisters who died the previous year. We invite family members to return to the monastery. During the service, we read the list of sisters who died that year, and a family member comes forward to light a candle. After prayer, the family members are invited to the dining room for a meal.

Dwelling Place Monastery, Martin

We have experienced the death and dying of a community member only once and so our "traditions" are very new. However, the rituals we began were found to be very meaningful and grace filled.

When nearing death Sr. Carolyn was released from the hospital at her request and was brought home to the monastery, and cared for by her community members. Her family members were welcomed to come and stay at the monastery and assist with her care.

Following is the ritual that we have established for the funeral and burial. Since the monastery grounds are on a mountain side, cremation is necessary for burial here. We have built a "Memory Garden" just below our oratory. It consists of walkways with stones for sitting on for reflection and a flower bed that contains the ashes.



Following her death, the sister's body will be bathed by designated community and/or family members. Within a day or so the community will gather to share stories to celebrate the sister's life. The liturgy committee will be responsible for planning the funeral service, incorporating the plans requested by the deceased sister. The sister's ring and a copy of her vows will be placed in the chapel during the funeral. The copy of her vows will be buried with her, designating that the vows have now been fulfilled. The ring will be kept to be used for another sister when she makes her final profession.

The funeral service begins with the community gathered for statio. The prioress leads the procession into the chapel, carrying the urn of ashes and placing them on a table in front of the altar. At the end of the service a family member or other designated person, leads the procession to the Memory Garden carrying the ashes. After the final interment service, the prioress buries the ashes in the garden.

A candle will be lit and a picture of the sister will be kept in the chapel during the funeral and for 30 days thereafter. The candle is put out and the picture put away within a simple liturgical ceremony, thereby giving closure. The sister's name will be mentioned in the petitions on her birthday and feastday for 1 year and on her death anniversary every year. There is a symbol of a tree on the wall inside the oratory with leaves on which the names and dates of the deceased sisters are inscribed.

St. Martin Monastery, Rapid City

If a sister is terminally ill at the monastery there will be an Anointing of the Sick in her room and most of the sisters will be present. Depending on the circumstances, a sister will stay with her and the prayers for the dying will be said when death is imminent. If a sister is terminally ill at the hospital the same would happen as far as possible.

On the afternoon of the wake the sisters meet the body in the front entrance of the monastery and the prayers for the meeting of the body are said. The sisters accompany the casket to the chapel. The wake





St. Martin, cont.

service is held in the monastery chapel, with the prioress presiding.

At the closing of the Mass for Christian Burial, the sisters sing the Suscipe. Every year on the anniversary of death she is prayed for in the Mass intentions. Her picture and life story are placed in a book which is displayed on the anniversary of each sister's death.

The deceased sisters' names and dates of birth and death are on a large memorial plaque in our front hall. Traditionally, on Memorial Day a number of the sisters attend Mass at our former chapel in Sturgis and visit the graves of the sisters buried there.



Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Crookston

At Mount Saint Benedict, Crookston, once we have been notified that a sister is near death sisters begin to vigil with her for 24 hours a day until her death. The day before the funeral, the sister is brought to the chapel where the community and family members wait to welcome her home for the final time. At the chapel door the subprioress reads from the Prologue 49 -50 from the Rule, and then the community sings the Suscipe. The Easter candle leads the procession of the prioress, the sub-prioress and the casket into the chapel. After the casket is placed before the altar, it is opened and the sisters and family are invited to pay their respects.



That evening, there is a wake service for the public, and time is spent reminiscing about the sister. This is followed by a small lunch in the monastic dining room where more memories are shared. After the Mass of Christian burial, the sister is laid to rest in our cemetery. The community sings the Ultima at the grave. The congregation returns to the monastery for either a meal or a small lunch.

Subprioress-House Coordinator Meeting

The annual meeting of Benedictine sub-prioresses and house coordinators was held at Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama September 21-26, 2017. The theme of the meeting was "Leadership: Strengthening the Network through Reverence and Zeal." Sr. Tonette Sperando, OSB, prioress at Cullman, and Sister Kimberly Porter, OSB, of St. Walburg Monastery, Covington, Kentucky were speakers for the event.



L-R, Front Row: Srs. Kimberly Prohaska, Barbara Helder, Rosemary DeGracias, Treva Heinberg, Ursula Butler, Marlene Miller. **2nd Row:** Srs. Ruth Feeney, Regina Schroeder, Rose Wilde, Sheila McGrath, Sharon Ann Haas, Mary Anne Koetter, Priscilla Cohen. **3rd Row:** Srs. Mary Weidner, Eileen Dunbar, Jane Becker. **4th Row:** Srs. Pia Rottinghaus, Francine Stallbaumer, Mary Mlady.