



An occasional newsletter of the Monastic Congregation of St. Gertrude

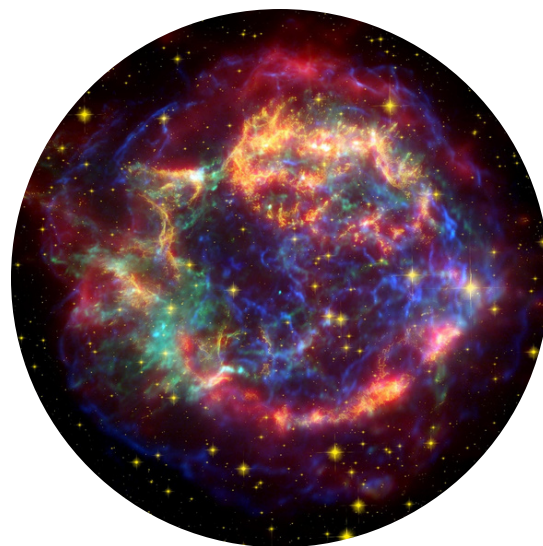
Message from the President by Sr. Jeanne Weber

This year, the slice of post-Christmas Ordinary Time is short, and by the time this newsletter comes out, we will be on the doorstep of Lent. Lent, this year, might be a fitting time to reflect, personally or communally, on the first direction statement that the Monastic Congregation Chapter set last summer.

As witnesses to Benedictine life, we commit ourselves to be communities of peace, safety, and prayer for all and to engage in deeper conversations with the church and the world.

One lens through which we might view this statement is its focus on interconnectedness and relationship, not only within and among our monastic communities, but with the broader communities of our church and world, and indeed, the whole of the cosmos. Modern research in both particle and astrophysics is showing us that all of creation, including the human, is connected in ways that, while not always available to our sensory perception, are nonetheless real. In his recent address to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Brian Swimme, an evolutionary cosmologist, says that the development of the entire universe “takes place through the power of relationship” and that indeed, “relationship is the most fundamental power in the universe” (Address to LCWR Assembly, August, 2023). He takes this all of the way back to the primordial flaring forth (his words) that scientists have come to call “the Big Bang.” In that 14

billion year ago cataclysm, protons coming into relationship with electrons created the first hydrogen atoms. These, and other primal atoms, became the building blocks of the galaxies, launching the cosmos as we know it. Likewise, around 700 million years ago, unicellular organisms, which were the only form of life on earth for three billion years, began to enter into the relationships which enabled more complex plant and animal life to evolve. (Ibid).



When I read what science is discovering about the creation and evolution of the universe I experience awe and wonder. With each scientific discovery, the mystery of the power of love that we call God only deepens. Swimme seems to share that stance of wonder in this passage in which he is speaking about supernovas:

After a certain span of time [in the evolution of the cosmos] in which all the elements are created in the core of a large star, it explodes. Because of that explosion we exist. Every element of our body was fashioned inside a star. The explosion of a star is a primary revelation of love at a cosmological level. A love that is a divine give away. A love that holds nothing back...A love that reveals the heart of divinity. The star dies in its final act of generosity, and out of that generosity, the future of the universe is born (ibid).

Swimme’s words bring to mind the beautiful hymn that opens the letter to the Philippians: *Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, / did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. / Rather, he emptied himself, / taking the form of a slave...* (Philippians 2:1-11, NRSV).

The nature of God and the nature of the universe created by God, is Love, Love that is willing to give itself totally—to the point of death—for the other. Our world, fractured and wounded as it is, desperately needs the monastic witness of self-giving love, our becoming ever-more-deeply communities of peace, safety, and prayer for all. Let us support one another with our prayers and through the witness of Benedictine Love and Peace.



MONASTERY OF ST. GERTRUDE, COTTONWOOD, IN



Sister Teresa Jackson (center) was elected 15th Prioress of the Monastery of St. Gertrude on November 12, 2023. The discernment process was led by Jane Becker, OSB (left) of Ferdinand, IN. Jeanne Weber, Monastic Congregation President, (right) presided over the canonical election. S. Teresa was installed during the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, December 3, 2023.

ST. BENEDICT MONASTERY, WINNIPEG

The year 2023 was one of many blessings, the most special of which is, of course, our move to our new monastery here in St. Boniface on July 21st. We are happily settled and very grateful to be here. Most sacred and stunning is our chapel! A residence on a single level, rooms with individual heating controls, high ceilings and open spaces on the inside as well as exquisite landscaping, attached and heated garages—all make for a wonderful home. We hosted four well-attended and very joyous Open House events. Archbishop Albert Legatt helped us to bless our new Monastery and we spent our first Christmas of hopefully many more Christmases here.



Our autumn celebrations included the anniversaries of Monastic Profession for Sister Gerarda Pura (75th) and Marie Baker (60th).



To mark the resuming of weekly community gatherings, we were each treated to a new pair of socks for the beginning of the new year in the school of the Lord's service.





QUEEN OF ANGELS MONASTERY, MT. ANGEL, OR

On December 27, the sisters of Queen of Angels Monastery and Catholic Community Services of the Mid-Willamette Valley and Central Coast (CCS) officially closed on the sale of the Queen of Angels property to CCS. The Sisters, who have moved to the Providence Benedictine Nursing Center's Orchard House next door, will continue to have offices in the former monastery building. A transfer ceremony is planned for March 20, 2024, during which CCS, the Benedictine Sisters and guests will come together to pray, celebrate and share hopes and dreams for the future of the monastery's buildings and land.

The Sisters have owned the historic monastery and grounds of Queen of Angels Monastery since 1887 when they purchased the property from Mount Angel Abbey. They have shared their monastic buildings and grounds in ministry to countless guests, students, oblates, retreatants, family, and friends. Now they entrust the mission and use of the property to Catholic Community Services and look forward to seeing what develops. They are deeply grateful for the partnership with and commitment of CCS to the people of Mount Angel, Marion County and beyond as well as to the many people who continue to support the Benedictine Sisters.

Traditional Christmas Caroling

Mount Angel Abbey monks gathered with Sisters and Orchard House residents to sing Christmas carols on the evening of December 29. Newly-ordained Father Charles Borromeo Gonzalez led the singing with his tambourine. This is a Christmas tradition for the sisters and the monks. This year is the making of a new tradition by inviting the Orchard House residents.



Fr. Charles Gonzales, Ss. Judith Bloxam, Regina Rausch, Dorothy Rausch, Donna Marie Chartraw.



Pictured left to right: S. Joseph Fennimore, S. Dorothy Jean Beyer, S. Donna Marie Chartraw, Jolyn Rothgery, S. Jane Hibbard, and Josh Graves, Catholic Community Services.

The sisters gather for prayer in their chapel.



L-R: Srs. Maureen Niedermeyer, Joseph Fennimore, Donna Marie Chartraw, Joan Pokorny, Christine Rausch, Dorothy Rausch, and Jane Hibbard.



L-R: Srs. Susan Casey, René Foster, Angela Meister, Judith Bloxam, Dorothy Jean Beyer, Regina Rausch, Marietta Schindler, and Mechtilde Fennimore.

**HOUSE OF BREAD MONASTERY, NANAIMO**

Sister Jean Ann celebrates her 87th birthday in great style.

For Christmas Sr. Rose Mary created a painting for the community that was divided into seven pieces. The painting incorporated a saying from Rumi: *At night, I open the window and ask the moon to come and press its face against mine.* After appreciating the painting as a whole each sister received one of the pieces to keep...to remember the part each one of us has played and continues to play in creating the whole. It was a wonderful surprise and very meaningful.



The Sisters of the House of Bread Monastery wish each of you a very Happy New Year filled with many blessings and manageable challenges.

MONASTIC CONGREGATION PRESIDENT'S SCHEDULE

- January 29-February 6: Beech Grove - Conference of Prioresses
- February 27-March 4: Cottonwood - Visitation
- March 18-23: Ferdinand - Council
- April 8-11: Yankton - Finance Committee
- April 15-18: Madison - Election
- May 18-20: Clyde - 150th Jubilee





ST SCHOLASTICA MONASTERY, FORT SMITH

On September 30, 2023, the monastery and its partners celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Girls' Education Matters (G.E.M.) scholarship program with a Fiesta of Solidarity. G.E.M aids girls and women in Esquipulas, Guatemala to attend school from elementary through college years. This annual event raised funds for the scholarships while celebrating a milestone of years of service with entertainment, food, wine, and an auction.



Cher and Mitch Horwedel with Sister Maria de Angeli. Anyone who knows S. Maria knows that she can dance up a storm!



On October 23, 2023, Sister Kimberly Prohaska, welcomed Sister Laura Cathcart, OSB, into the process of transfer to St. Scholastica Monastery. Sr. Laura has been a member of Holy Angels Convent in Jonesboro, Arkansas.



St. Scholastica monastery held its annual bake sale on November 9, 2023. The event is a fundraiser for the monastery, with the sisters baking bread and other goodies as well as putting up jams and jellies.



OUR LADY OF GRACE MONASTERY, BEECH GROVE

Statistics show that women live longer than men and women religious live even longer! Our Lady of Grace in Beech Grove boasts a centenarian in Sr. Mary Carol Messmer who celebrated her 100th birthday last summer. A festive party of 125 people, including her siblings, friends, former students, and nieces and nephews of several generations joined the Sisters as we toasted the wisdom in our midst. Two mayors attended and proclaimed with official declarations that June 4, 2023 was Sr. Mary Carol Day in Indianapolis and Beech Grove.

In July we honored Sr. Mary Carol again as we celebrated her 80th Jubilee. As a member of Monastery Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, and a founding member of Our Lady of Grace, Sr. Mary Carol spent 60 years in the classroom. During her retirement, she acted as sacristan and still sings in the schola, never misses prayer, leads daily rosary for vocations, sews aprons, and is an inspiration to all of us.

If it's true we get better with age, it's no wonder Sr. Mary Carol is nearly perfect!



Sr. Mary Carol singing the Susipe during her 80th jubilee.



Sr. Mary Carol flanked by two of her siblings

ST MARTIN MONASTERY, RAPID CITY

For many years, the Sisters of St. Martin Monastery have hosted local oblates during Advent. This year's gathering was held on the afternoon of December 9th and those gathered enjoyed hot cider, coffee and treats. It was the first time the Oblates gathered in the sisters' new space. Mary Garrigan, a long-time oblate, attended the 5th International Oblates Congress in Rome in September. She prepared a slide show and shared her experiences of the Congress and the many field trips they enjoyed while in Rome. Our oblate program was begun by Sr. Marmion Howe in the mid-1980's and currently has 10-12 active members who meet 9 times a year for formation, education, and fellowship.



Rapid City oblates (back) with the sisters (front): Yvette Mallow (in white sweater), Bernadette Ward, Carol Kovarik, Therese Marie Furois, Mary Wegher, and Lorane Coffin.



MONASTERY IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, FERDINAND

Oblate Team

After a year-long study by our community of Oblates, a new leadership structure has been determined and leaders have been elected. The new structure calls for an Oblate Leadership Team composed of a director, a formation coordinator, and a communication coordinator, all to be elected by the Oblates. Working closely with this team is a sister liaison, appointed by the Prioress. The new director is Oblate Stephanie Smith. The formation coordinator is Oblate Shirley France, and the communication coordinator is Oblate Lynn Belli. Sr. Betty Drewes is currently serving as the sister liaison. The new leadership was blessed and installed for a term of three years by Sr. Anita Louise at the monthly gathering of the Oblates on Sunday, January 14.

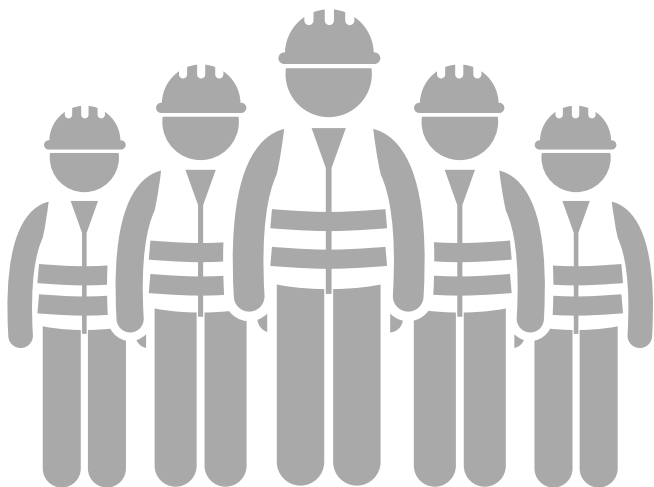


*The new oblate leadership team with their Sister Liaison:
From left to right: Oblate Shirley France, Sr. Betty
Drewes, Oblate Stephanie Smith, and Oblate Lynn Belli*

Renovation Work Underway

Last year, we made the decision to close our in-house licensed nursing facility, Hildegard Health Center, and to transition sisters needing nursing care to Scenic Hills at the Monastery, a privately owned nursing facility located on our property. This move has allowed us to do some renovation work of the third floor of St. Benedict Hall where Hildegard Health Center had been located. Work includes installing water efficient toilets, changing out bathroom fixtures, installing LED lighting, painting, and adding shower stalls in the common shower rooms. Plus, one room, formerly used as an office, will be transformed into a new, hair care room for all the sisters' use.

When finished, Community Health, our quasi-assisted living area, will move to this floor. There will be 16 bedrooms for sisters who live on the floor along with 2 rooms set aside for sisters recovering from surgeries, injuries, etc. Work on this floor is scheduled to be completed by late spring/early summer. The renovation coincides with recommendations from our planning process with KEB consultants, which was completed last summer.



UNDER CONSTRUCTION



DWELLING PLACE MONASTERY, MARTIN

The Kentucky sisters of the Dwelling Place Monastery are growing, in new ways. We are currently in the process of adding a new form of membership to our community, that of claustral oblate. In fact, we have our first candidate, Chris Becker.

Chris is one of our oblates and lived with us for over two years while she worked in the region before moving back to Ohio to be with family. After having several in-house meetings about what we were calling "other forms of membership" we found a document by Fr. Dan Ward about claustral oblates. This form of belonging seemed to be a good fit for us and the more we talked about it, the more we felt called to try it here. And immediately we thought of Chris, who had been doing her own discernment on what was next for her journey.

Chris joined us in November and is actively participating in the daily life here at Mt Tabor as well as being part of the development team on this new way to live in our monastic community. She is a very good fit for us and, while there are bumps in the road that come with anyone new to a community, we are all pleased with the possibilities God has given us to continue living our monastic life here at the Dwelling Place. Please hold us, Chris, and the process in your prayers.



Left to right Sitting: S. Mary Going, Oblate Chris Becker, S. Judy Yunker; Standing: S. Kathleen Weigand, S. Eileen Schepers, S. Kathy DiVaio, S. Kathy Curtis, and S. Jan Barthel.



SACRED HEART MONASTERY, DICKINSON

Not much is happening these days except for the tremendous effort at staying warm. We have had very cold weather. We hope that next week it will improve. We need snow for spring moisture and to cover the winter wheat and the pastures. Spring moisture will be the issue if this trend continues.

Here at the Monastery we are down to the birds as our only animals. We have taken to feeding them. You can see how tasty our food is by the pictures. Even a squirrel jumps in for a little nourishment.

We are in the process of finishing details regarding our monastic ministry that needs attention. We are finding a partner who will take over Catholic sponsorship of our long-term care center and retirement home. We established the nursing home in 1941 but since 2001 we have only been responsible for the catholicity of the institution. The ecumenical partnership of 23 years has worked well so we would like to see it continue. Pray for us.





MOUNT ST BENEDICT MONASTERY, CROOKSTON

At the instigation and planning of Sue Murphy*, our Transportation Director and member of our Advisory Committee, the Sisters of Saint Benedict of Crookston were delighted to participate in "The 5 Days of Christmas" each day from January 8th through 12th. Each afternoon was a special day of a great Christmas game, hot beverages and a delicious snack. The unique themes for each day were:

- Day One: Christmas Jeopardy, with a snack of angel food cake with strawberries.
- Day Two: Christmas 20 Questions with a snack of puff popcorn.
- Day Three: Christmas Bingo, with a snack of Rice Krispie bars.
- Day Four: Christmas Concentration with a snack of wafer cookies.
- Day Five: Christmas Family Feud with a snack of strawberry cheesecake.

There was LOTS of laughter and fun!



Srs. Judy Moen, Karen Violette, Rachel Beitz, Kathleen McGeary, Eileen Mohs, and Anita Whalen.



**Sue Murphy is currently being mentored by Sr. Kathleen McGeary so that she can move into the role of Monastery Care Coordinator.*

Sue Murphy (with S. Eileen Beutel in the background)





SACRED HEART MONASTERY, YANKTON, SD



Sisters and Staff of Sacred Heart Monastery took part in the Holiday Festival of Lights parade which was held November 30, 2023 in Yankton. *From left to right are: S. Bonita Gacnik, Julie Amsberry, S. Patricia Ann Toscano, S. Patricia Heirigs, S. Mary Jo Polak, S. Kathleen Courtney, S. Sharon Ann Haas, S. Jeanne Weber, S. Carmy Luke, and Tonya Schild.*

CITIZENS OF THE YEAR

The Benedictine Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton were delighted to find they have been chosen as Citizens of the Year for 2023. The distinction is awarded through a nomination process spearheaded by the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan, and a group of civic leaders in the community chooses recipients. According to newspaper editor Kelly Hertz, "While couples have been lauded at times, never before has an entire group of people been chosen for the award."

At a time when their numbers are dwindling and the future is uncertain, the sisters are humbled by the award and are reminded of the important role they have in Yankton. Since the late 1800's when Bishop Martin Marty asked them to help educate Native American children, the sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery have helped where the need is greatest, first with education, then health care. S. Kathy Burt stated, "...when we look towards the future we're going to do what we've always been called to do, and that's to be aware and to meet the needs that are in this area now."



Pictured Left to Right

Seated: Ss. Arthur Schramm, Phyllis Hunhoff, Kate Crowley, Janice Mayer, Aidan Bourke, Louise Marie Goettertz

Standing: Ss. Cynthia Binder, Kathy Burt, Denette Leifeld, Marcine Quintas, Marlene Stetz, Jill Young, Jeanne Ranek, Kathleen Courtney, Debra Kolecka, Mary Jo Polak, Jennifer Kehrwald, Penny Bingham, Carmy Luke, Joyce Streff, Mary Carol Curran, Joyce Feterl, Carol Jean VanDenHemel, Sharon Ann Haas, Candyce Chrystal, Norma Norton, Bonita Gacnik, Mildred Busch, Marielle Frigge, Marita Kolbeck



To read the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan article, scan the QR code.



A MINISTRY IS BORN!

It is with immense pleasure and enthusiasm that we announce the official launch of Benedictine Tech Ministries – a unique initiative created by a group of dedicated Benedictine sisters from the 55 & Under group to cater to the technology needs of other Benedictine communities, particularly in relation to intercommunity conferences.

Benedictine Tech Ministries aims to provide comprehensive technological support and expertise to Benedictine communities in their efforts to host hybrid conferences and meetings. We understand the unique requirements and challenges associated with organizing events that incorporate both physical and virtual technological components, and our team is geared towards seamlessly integrating these two realms.



Our services include, but are not limited to:

1. Virtual, hybrid, or in-person conference platform setup, execution and clean up.
2. Technical support during the planning and execution phases of conference/meeting.
3. Maintaining a shared file of easy-to-follow instructions for basic operations for personal devices.
4. Coming soon: Individual training for specific areas for community technicians.
5. Coming soon: Monastic Technology Conference for community technicians.

By availing of Benedictine Tech Ministries' services, sister communities can focus on the spiritual and intellectual aspects of their conferences while entrusting the technical aspects to a dedicated team within the Benedictine family.

For more information about us please visit our web page where you will find specific information about all our services, a page of FAQ's, information about our team, a contact us page, and a request for a quote page. You can also reach us anytime via email at the address below.

We sincerely look forward to the prospect of serving your technological needs and forging lasting partnerships within the Benedictine community.

WEB PAGE: <https://bentechministries.wixsite.com/ben-tech-ministries>

EMAIL: bentechministries@gmail.com

Sister Tamra Thomas (St. Joseph, Minnesota)
 Sister Michelle Sinkhorn (Ferdinand, Indiana)
 Sister Raphaela Cady (Lacey, Washington)
 Sister Stefanie MacDonald (Rock Island, Illinois)





In Memorium: Ruth Fox, OSB, 1936-2023



Sister Ruth Fox, 8th President of the Monastic Congregation of St. Gertrude and member of Sacred Heart Monastery in Dickinson, ND died on September 23, 2023 at Good Samaritan St. Vincent's in Bismarck, where she had been residing since August of 2022. According to Sister Paula Larson, Sister Ruth was a farm girl from North Dakota who made her first contact with the Benedictine Sisters as a youngster when the Sisters came to teach summer catechism. This contact was the beginning seed of a long and fruitful Benedictine life.

Sister Kathryn Huber and Sister Joella Kidwell, two of Ruth's successors as president, characterize her as a model of monastic living, a woman of prayer and service, a teacher and model of feminine leadership, and a wise steward. She brought to the role of president a deep knowledge of church and monastic history, as well as of women in the scriptures.

Sister Kathryn remembers that in 1992 when she was a relatively new prioress, Sister Ruth conducted the canonical visitation of the Ferdinand community. She says, "Sister Ruth provided a listening and gentle presence. I recall her being an encourager and comforter not only to the community but to me personally." She also relates that at the time of that visitation, an earthquake was predicted along a fault near southern Indiana and preparations were being made. "I recall Sister Ruth carrying her plane ticket with her the entire time. I did not have the heart to tell her there were about 12 bridges and overpasses on the Interstate between Ferdinand and the Louisville airport. Fortunately, there was no earthquake and all ended well!"

Sister Joella remembers Sister Ruth as supportive and also challenging when necessary. "I recall her meeting with me and sharing there was another way to do a task that I was about and to do it a little more gently. I also admired how Sister Ruth served us as President and at the same time lived monastic life fully in her own community. And I recall her encouragement during the challenging years of my time as Federation President."

Sister Kathryn served with Sister Ruth on the Federation Council from 1993-1999, including as First Councilor. Of that time she says, "It was a great experience to share, travel, and work with Ruth. She organized and facilitated each meeting with grace and professionalism. Time for fun was always included." Sister Kathryn also recalls that Sister Ruth highly respected the autonomy of member monasteries. "When Spirit of Life Monastery in Lakewood, CO was down to two members, the council encouraged Sister Ruth to approach them about closure. Sister Ruth felt it was better to let the community come to this decision themselves. Just two weeks later the two sisters contacted Sister Ruth for assistance with closure."

Sr. Kathryn reflects that, as prioress of her own community and as Federation President, Sister Ruth walked in a line of strong monastic leaders. In the early 2000s the Council commissioned her to write a book on the topic of monastic leadership. She graciously accepted the commission and *Wisdom Leadership: Reflections on the Ministry of Monastic Leadership* was published in 2003. "It is a treasure for monastic leadership to this day." Both Sisters Kathryn and Joella regard themselves blessed to have known Sister Ruth Fox as colleague, mentor, companion, and friend.

Sister Paula shares that Sister Ruth's sisters at Sacred Heart Monastery "experienced her as a wholesome person fully involved in monastic spirituality and living. We supported her in sharing her wisdom as a monastic woman not only at home but throughout the United States and abroad. She had a unique and gentle way of saying what needed to be said or written. She was always willing to share her learning with us. We feel blessed to have had her in our community and I know she would say likewise."

May this wise and gentle woman, monastic, and leader rest in peace.