



Radical Hospitality: The Heart of Our Humanity (And How Practicing it Will Change You)

All summer long, guests arrived at the Cleary farm. Cousins came to ride the ponies. Aunts and uncles to visit with the parents. Meals were prepared, served and cleaned up after. Beds were changed and floors were swept. On the first of September Mrs. Cleary said, “This is the first day this summer we have not had guests.”



Sister Catherine
Cleary, OSB

Sister Catherine Cleary’s parents taught their children how to extend ready and joyful hospitality to all comers, as her fond memory above attests. When she entered the Benedictine community, with its emphasis on hospitality, it felt like home.

Hospitality is a core value of monastic life. St. Benedict tells us to

“let all guests who arrive be received as Christ,” with honor, service and kindness.

Christ himself modeled this hospitality throughout his lifetime, as he received the other – women, tax collectors, Samaritans and Pharisees – with full acceptance and without judgment. He opened himself to all he met, inviting them to be open to him. And that, at the heart of it, is real hospitality. It’s not hotel-type service – although service and readiness are components – but letting down the barriers of pretense and fear so that others can feel welcomed to be who they are. Radical hospitality is really a practice of radical honesty, with others and ourselves.

I will be me so you can be you

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-26), he spoke with her. This was remarkable in itself, as men simply did not interact publicly with women – let alone enemy Samaritans – at the time. But there was more. Jesus accepted her, an adulterer reviled by many, for who she was. And he offered himself. ▶



Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB

Letter from the Prioress

Saint Benedict calls us to “seek peace and pursue it.”

As our community looks to the future one of our deepest hopes is that we be – for ourselves and all who come here – a center of peace.

Creating a peaceful environment and sharing it with others is at the heart of our Mission.

We are so aware that a lack of peace pervades our culture. Thus, even more urgently, we are called to seek peace and pursue it.

If you’ve visited the monastery this summer you’ve noticed posters throughout our home with photos of Sisters and the caption “Let Peace Begin With Me.” They are a reminder that each of us bears responsibility to be a seeker of peace in our everyday life.

I urge you, our friends, family, and associates, to join us as we seek to be a peaceful presence in our world.

May your heart be at peace as you read this issue of Connecting Point!

“It’s a story of profound seeing and accepting,” Sister Mary Core, OSB says. “It’s also about sharing oneself. Jesus responds with simple honesty and openness. He shares who he is, which leaves him vulnerable to criticism and ridicule.



Sister Mary Core, OSB

“Real hospitality is hard work. It’s not just clean towels and bedding. It’s about relationship, in the deepest sense of the word.”

It’s about revealing our honest self, so that others feel safe to be themselves in our presence.

Sister Charlotte Sonnevile, OSB says another parable shares the archetypal example of radical hospitality.

“The Good Samaritan cares for a stranger – an enemy, the other – wholeheartedly,” she says. “This is what we are called to do. To offer

loving presence and assistance to everyone, no matter who they are.”

Which is what Sister Margaret Murphy, OSB received one wintry evening in Peoria.

When the stranger is you

Sr. Margaret stood at the edge of a busy thoroughfare, looking at the restaurant on the other side. She had promised to meet someone there, but the pavement looked icy. Traffic was heavy, too.



Sister Margaret Murtphy, OSB

“I didn’t know what to do,” she says. “I couldn’t cross the street, but going back wasn’t an option. It was sleeting and the sidewalks were getting icy too.”

Suddenly an old car pulled over. It seemed to be piled to the roof with stuff. A voice asked if Sr. Margaret would like a ride. A teenage boy made room on the backseat for her. ▶



Sister Charlotte Sonnevile’s grandfather gifted this stained glass window of the Good Samaritan to Sacred Heart Church, Moline, Ill., in the early 1900s.



Sister Stefanie MacDonald welcomes guests in the monastery library.

“I think they were living in the car,” Sr. Margaret says. “They drove me to the restaurant. I said, *I have nothing to give you for it*. They said they didn’t want anything. I realized as I got out that *I* was the stranger. They didn’t know me at all, yet they had cared for me.”

Really, they had cared for each other. The welcome given was gratefully accepted, creating a relationship that nourished them all. To do so, though, both parties had to set aside their mutual fear.

While we might wisely proceed with caution in such situations – no one would suggest we should offer or accept rides from strangers today – we have cell phones that can be used to call for help.

When fear guides us

Fear is a great motivator, and sometimes it is well founded. Yet fear can create what Sister Marlene Miller, OSB calls “negative hospitality,” in which we blame

the other for our own reluctance to help. For example, the family who stopped to help Sr. Margaret might have chosen to scoff at her instead, blaming her for putting herself in the predicament. Her culpability would not only have excused anyone from offering help, it would have made not helping an act of righteousness.



Sister Marlene Miller, OSB

turning the stranger into the enemy as an act of self-protection. Another way we protect ourselves is through conditional hospitality, in which we withhold welcome unless and until certain behaviors are established.

“Hospitality and hostility share the same Latin root word,” Sr. Marlene says. “It meant stranger or enemy.” In a sense, then, hostility is the negative cousin of hospitality,

“You can offer conditional hospitality – *You do this, and I’ll welcome you* – or unconditional hospitality – *I welcome you for who you are*,” Sr. Marlene says. “Genuine hospitality is unconditional; it’s warm and open.”

Although hospitality has profound implications for both parties, the welcome we extend must not be dependent upon the other’s acceptance, reciprocation or good will.

Choosing hospitality despite rejection

Saying *Good morning* to someone who doesn’t return our greeting can trip our switch from hospitality to hostility in an instant. Indeed, practicing hospitality can sometimes seem an exercise in self-flagellation. So why do it?

Because it’s good for us all.

The woman who snubbed us in the elevator may go into her morning a ▶



little happier because of our warm greeting. The man who was gruff on the phone may be softer with others. And we ourselves become more Christlike.



Sister Stefanie MacDonald, OSB

Sister Stefanie MacDonald, OSB says any time you go out into the world you run the risk of rejection.

“My younger sister and I were walking along the river when

we passed an obviously disturbed man,” she says. “He was insulting everyone who walked by, including us. I acknowledged his presence and smiled at him. Greeting all as Christ means greeting all, period.”

The point is, we are called to love everyone, whether or not we like them or what they do.

“We have to be able to say, *I welcome you even though I may not*

like you or what you say or how you treat me,” Sr. Mary says. “We have to be courageous enough to want what’s best for them.”

And when we can’t quite summon the genuine good will and love required? Or they respond with silence or scorn?

“Whenever I have a negative encounter with someone, I say the Lord’s Prayer for them and me,” Sr. Stefanie says.

“It helps me welcome Jesus Christ in us both.”

Welcoming Jesus Christ in ourselves

Being in a hospitable relationship with God is the first step toward being able to offer hospitality to ourselves. As Sr. Stefanie prays the Lord’s Prayer, she both offers and accepts that hospitality. Welcoming Jesus – while also accepting Jesus’s welcome of

us – leads us to practice honesty, acceptance and kindness to ourselves. It leads us to love ourselves, as Jesus himself commanded in Matthew 22.

Care for self is why Holy Leisure is part of St. Benedict’s Rule. We are to give ourselves prayerful, restorative quiet and activities that revitalize us. We are, in other words, to give ourselves ‘me’ time.

It’s neither easy nor optional.

“Hospitality to self is a challenge,” Sr. Stefanie says. “It means giving ourselves what we need in order to be who we are. It means accepting ourselves fully. We’re not always good at that. I know that my alone time helps me be centered and balanced and able to give myself to others.”

Sister Helen Carey, OSB says by accepting your own hospitality to yourself you gain much to give. ▶



Sister Helen Carey,
OSB

“The practice of hospitality to self means that I can be at home with who I am as well as with who others are,” she says. “It allows me to practice peace, hope and comfort.”

Balancing our needs against theirs

There are times when our hospitality will be stretched beyond what we feel we can offer. It can be a fine line between others’ needs and our own.

“We have to be vulnerable enough to let someone else mess up our house for a while,” Sr. Mary says. “To invite them in with mud on their shoes. But hospitality doesn’t mean accepting destructive behavior toward self or others. And we need to avoid doing things for them that will cause resentment either on our part or theirs.”

Hospitality sometimes requires discernment, as when someone barges into our office or asks for time we feel we cannot spare.

“Hospitality requires some internal dialogue,” Sister Marianne Burkhard, OSB says. “We want to be open, to get off our personal agenda at least for a moment. Jesus Christ himself led an interrupted life.”

Sister Jackie Walsh, OSB says her job might look like nothing *but* interruptions from the outside. As administrative assistant for Benet House Retreat Center, she answers the phone and greets guests all day.

“Interruptions are my job,” she says. “My ministry is serving our guests and making them feel comfortable.

“You don’t realize what an impact you make in their lives until you read their evaluations. We find out we’ve touched them. They touch us, too.”

In other words, *Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.* (Hebrews 13:1-2)

Sr. Catherine shares a similar lesson through this favorite story:

“A woman hears a knock at the door,” she says. “She wakes up, goes to the door and sees Jesus standing there. She asks him in and says, *Welcome, Jesus! I’m so glad you came. But did you have to come at 2 in the morning?*”

“If you can see the person in front of you as Jesus Christ himself, it’s amazing how revived you can get.”

So, put a candle in your window

Hospitality opens the door of the human heart. It makes way for deep connection. And although we cannot expect mutual welcome, we can expect change to occur for both.

“Extending hospitality to others nurtures them whether or not we see them bloom,” Sister Rita Cain, OSB says. “It does the same for us. Without realizing it, we become better people.”

Grace is the gift of our welcoming presence, given freely and lovingly.



Sister Rita Cain,
OSB

“An Irish custom is to put a candle in the window to welcome strangers,” Sr. Margaret says. “If you can’t put a candle in your window, put a smile on your face.

“We spend our lives doing when we should spend them being. That’s what people will remember. How we are to them.”

In the end, practicing hospitality is about being present to others – and ourselves. It’s about listening without a personal agenda. It’s about opening ourselves to all.

It’s about *becoming*.

And it’s what Jesus taught us.

Pictured at left, Sister Marianne Burkhard visits with Benedictine Oblates in the dining room.



Hospitality Tips for Home, Strangers and Self

Maintaining a welcoming stance is sometimes a little challenging. We don't always feel like it. And we don't always like the person we're supposed to welcome.

Nevertheless, we are called to it for good reason. By greeting all as Christ, we keep our own hearts soft. We invite others to respond with openness and gentleness. And we extend God's own welcome into the world.

Sister Stefanie MacDonald offers this 3-part method for practicing hospitality with everyone.

1. Hospitality to strangers is often easier to manage than hospitality to family. For one thing, they probably haven't let us down yet. And we aren't irritated by the way they leave their socks in the hallway!

Whether we interact with a store clerk or someone on the telephone, it helps to plan ahead to be atten-

tive and kind. Know that they have the same hopes, fears and sorrows that we do ... and that we have the power to turn their day (and ours) around!

2. Hospitality to those we interact with daily can be more challenging. Family, officemates and friends come with tics that can drive us crazy. We sometimes want to shout at the person forever clanking a spoon against the coffee cup, *Stop it! I can't stand being around you!*

It helps to remember we ourselves come with tics, and hope others overlook them. Focus on the whole person. Welcome the Christ who stands in front of you, inviting you to become who you are called to be.

As for those we really don't like? We're called to love them anyway, and treat them with the dignity and respect Jesus showed all. Practice seeing Jesus. It works!

3. Hospitality to self is often the most difficult task. It's hard to accept ourselves fully when we are so familiar with our own faults. And it's hard to allow ourselves the leisure we need to recharge our batteries.

It helps to see ourselves as God sees us: beloved and cherished children who are worth everything. We deserve kindness ... and others benefit from the happiness we experience when we are well cared for!

Pictured above, the Sisters enjoy leisure together during weekly community night. From left-to-right: Sisters Claudia Scharf, Margaret Murphy, Sheila McGrath, Stefanie MacDonald, Charlotte Sonnevile and Jackie Walsh.



A Benedictine Pilgrimage

By Oblates Madeleine Callahan and Toni Wilken with Sister Ruth Ksycki, OSB

Sr. Ruth Ksycki, Oblates Toni Wilken and Madeleine Callahan went on a 10-day pilgrimage to three monasteries in our Federation. At the center of it was a five-day North American (yes, Bahamas and Winnipeg, Canada also came) Oblate directors conference in Duluth, MN.

It was so affirming to experience the personal welcome at each monastery, their prayer spaces and singing traditions, their artwork and history. However, it was the new Benedictine friends and recognizable kinship which changed us on this journey. We were struck by the affirmation of our common Benedictine language found in moments of sharing meals and in serious discussions after our excellent talks. We felt grounded because of all the quiet times given to us as well as the four times of daily praying with the community of St. Scholastica.

The theme of the conference was *Benedictine Values & Practices: Tools for Living; Tools for Life*. Fr. Rene McGraw, St John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN spoke of stability using the theme of "Build the City of God." Wherever our home may be, we build with love, prayer, forgiveness, beauty of the environment, and welcoming others.

Sr. Theresa Schumacher, OSB St. Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, MN focused our attention on "The Holy Woman, Scholastica - Telling her story, Living her story." Attendees were asked to write their own stories. (You may read Madeleine's poem story at oblatemusingsblog.smmsisters.org/.) Sr. Mary Reuter, OSB also of St. Benedict's Monastery, shared her thoughts on "God is Speaking, Listen Today." Her main theme was: When we attend to today, the now, we become beholders of God's word, God's love. Listening is the inner sensitivity needed to become beholders. It helps us be aware of God's presence.

One leaves on pilgrimage with anticipation, journeys along many miles of discovery of new vistas and friends, pauses for listening, for singing psalms, for mapping a larger Oblate world. Yes, we asked many questions because these are uncertain and often cruel times. We came back from the pilgrimage renewed and reaffirmed in our Benedictine way of life. Thank you, Sisters, for sponsoring us to go to the 2017 NAABOD meeting!

For information about the Oblate program, contact Sister Ruth at 309-283-2106 or oblates@smmsisters.org.

Pictured above, L-R: Oblate Toni Wilken, Sr. Ruth, and Oblate Madeleine Callahan.



Monastery Notes

Practicing Peace

Posters like the one featuring Sister Mary Jane Wallace, OSB at right have been popping up all over the monastery this summer, as we underscore the growing need for personal responsibility in our time. We invite you to practice peace with us, and offer this prayer, adapted from one attributed to St. Francis of Assisi:



Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
 Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
 Where there is injury, let me pardon.
 Where there is doubt, let me show faith.
 Where there is despair, let me share hope.
 Where there is darkness, let me shine light.

Where there is sadness, let me offer joy.
 Where there is coldness, let me bring warmth.
 Where there is hurt, let me soothe.
 For all of my fellow beings, and for all of Your Creation, Lord:
 Make me an instrument
 of your loving, forgiving, everlasting peace.

Sisters Celebrate Anniversaries



Sr. Norberta



Sr. Paula

Sister Norberta Vandersnick, OSB celebrated 70 years as a Benedictine Sister. When asked why she chose the Benedictine community, she said she was attracted to the “total giving to others and friendliness” of the Benedictines. She has served in education and food service.

Sister Paula Helenthal, OSB celebrated 50 years as a Benedictine Sister. She has served as an educator, coach, RCIA instructor and in other ministries.

Benedictine News

For the third summer, the Sisters welcomed 160 grade school students for the Rock Island Summer Enrichment Initiative, a program designed to provide an academic boost, positive summer influences, and nutritious meals to students who would not have them otherwise. Shown at right, Sister Bobbi Bussan poses with a group from 2016.



Sisters Susan Hutchens and Stefanie MacDonald attended the ABFC (American Benedictine Formation Conference) at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, IN.

Sisters Sandra Brunenn, Sheila McGrath, Charlotte Sonnevile, Marianne Burkhard, Marlene Miller, Janet Cassidy, and Susan Hutchens attended a presentation by Father Michael Casey OSCO on “Monasticism in the Twenty-First Century: A View from the Trenches” at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, IN.

Sisters Ruth Ksycki and Mary Core attended the Monastic Institute 2017 at St. John’s, Collegeville, MN for study of Pope Francis’s “Laudato Si: On Care for our Common Home.”

Sisters Marlene Miller, Marianne Burkhard, Sheila McGrath, Helen Carey, Marilyn Ring, Susan Hutchens, Janet Cassidy, and Sandra Brunenn represented the Benedictine Sisters in the Churches United unit of marchers in the Fourth of July Parade held in Bettendorf, IA (pictured on page 8).

Sister Stefanie MacDonald (far right in photo at right) attended the Giving Voice Gathering at Iona College in New Rochelle, NY. Giving Voice is a peer led organization that creates spaces for Catholic Sisters who are 50 and younger to give voice to their hopes, dreams and challenges in religious life.



Sister Ruth Ksycki, Oblate Director, and Oblates Madeleine Callahan and Toni Wilken attended the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors Conference at St. Scholastica’s Monastery, Duluth, MN.

Sisters Charlotte Sonnevile and Mary Core attended the Monastic Worship Forum in Subiaco, AR.

Sisters Sandra Brunenn and Sheila McGrath attended the National Leadership Conference of Women Religious Conference in Orlando, FL with 800 other leaders of women’s religious communities.

Sisters Charlotte Sonnevile, Mary Schmidt, Ruth Ksycki, and Marianne Burkhard participated in a No Hate Rally organized in response to the distribution of hate literature in the Quad City area.

Sister Roberta Bussan, attended the Association of Benedictine Retreat Centers Symposium at Khoury House, Subiaco, AR.





Monastery Notes (Continued)

A Benedictine Tip: Less Stuff = More Freedom

How much of your “stuff” do you really need? If you’re like most of us, probably very little. But there it is, anyway, cluttering, filling and overflowing your life: There’s the trinket you bought at the mall, for 50% off. There’s the box of notecards you couldn’t resist but haven’t used, taking up space in your desk drawer. There’s the closet full of clothes you haven’t worn in years. Too much stuff weighs us down.

Instead of enriching us, it impoverishes us with its demands on our time, our psyches and our consciences: You can’t find your other shoe! (It’s under the mound of shoes that you don’t ever wear.) You can’t decide which – insert item – to use. (If you only had one, you wouldn’t worry about it.) You really should give – insert item – away, because you never use it. (You feel guilty, but can’t bring yourself to do it.)

Less stuff = More freedom. It’s a simple formula, known by Catholic Sisters everywhere. We call it “poverty.” It means being in right relationship with material goods. It does not mean being impoverished.

It calls for careful discernment between wants and needs. Do you need those notecards? No. You have plenty. But they’re 50% off! That doesn’t change the answer to the key question of need. That said, it’s okay to get things we want sometimes! They can brighten our spirits! (And, in doing so, they can indeed satisfy a need.)

Choosing poverty is also about not being overly attached to our material goods. To willingly give and share. After all, we are only stewards of our things: homes, cars, shoes. Someone else will have them someday.

Benedictines practice poverty. We hold everything in common, meaning that everything we have is there for the use of everyone. We have all we need and all we desire.

So, look around. What can you do without? What can you give away or share? Start small, and feel the weight of your spirit begin to lighten!

This tip comes from our annual summer retreat. It’s posted in its entirety as a free 10-part online retreat at <https://monasterywisdomvocationblog.smmsisters.org/2017/06/12/your-online-summer-retreat/>.

SMA News



Several alumnae from the Class of 1967 enjoyed time together in Nauvoo over the first weekend of August. Seated, l-r: Pegi Radel Langan, Linda Haas, Sue Kron. Standing, l-r: Becky Manka Swartz, Vicki Hopp Newton, Peggy Vogel Allen, Mayra Daniel Carrillo, Marian Orf Hal

In Memoriam ...

Rita Shaughnessy Downing, '45, died April 24, 2017.

George Florey, husband of **Patricia Henseler, '56**, died March 30.

Harold Stoerger, husband of **Joan Maley, '51**, died April, 2017.

Bill Kirshner, husband of **Jo Kelly, '63**, died February, 2017.

Ann Doyle-Dimmick, mother of **Paula Lenz, '63** and **Joan Peterson, '69**, died June, 2017.

Claire Murphy Hoffman, '42, mother of **Peggy Bottone, '69** and sister of **Eleanor, '39** and **Marie '30** died April 1, 2017.

Kay Wiedinger Berres, '56, died June 30, 2017.

Dorothy (Dodie) Kelly '52, died in 2016.

Mary Margaret Feeney Boland, '46, died July 25, 2017

Patricia Cain Jackson, '48, sister of **Mary Pat Cain, '46**, **Rita Cain, '50** and **Sheila Cain Butler, '53** died.

Patricia Phoenix Fry, '53 died.

Reunion Announcements

Class of 1975

Oct. 6-8, 2017

Class of 1967

June 1-3, 2018

Class of 1962

July 20-22, 2018

Class of 1964

Aug. 17-19, 2018

Class of 1959

Sept. 28-30, 2018

Class of 1973

Oct. 12-14, 2018

ATTENTION ALUMS:

Reserve your space at Benet House as early as possible to improve your chance of securing space for your next reunion. We fill up years in advance!



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