

Creating the Beauty We're Called To

Lisa Westfield credits the Benedictine Sisters with introducing her to the joy of creating when she was in high school.

“Sister Veronica Shunick introduced me to the love of ceramics,” Lisa Westfield, St. Mary’s Academy Class of 1976, says. “I had no idea that this medium would speak to me! My love of singing was reinforced there, and I still sing in a choir. I also write poetry, which I started doing at Saint Mary’s.”

Whether we create through painting or song, we are all creators. We create our homes, memories, solutions. We create a love of beauty. We create our lives.

There are lots of evidence-backed reasons to embrace a creative life. It’s good for the health of our brains, for one thing. They thrive on new experiences, building strong neuronal connections in response.

A creative life also matters to our hearts. It allows us to reach our deaths free of such regrets as *we never expressed our feelings*, or *we didn’t live our lives*

being true to ourselves (from *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* by Bronnie Ware).

Creating matters to body, mind and spirit. It’s both a spiritual practice and a personal pursuit. May the Benedictine Sisters’ musings on it encourage you to encounter this season of change, growth and renewal with a willing heart and ready hands!

Art is not only the ability to draw and paint, but the ability to recognize beauty. – Sister Mary Alexia Walters, OSB

Living a Creative Life Sister Helen Carey, OSB

Creativity requires some inner freedom. Freedom to not be too tied to our schedules or to-do lists. Freedom to be flexible; to be open to new possibilities; to be open to the way the Holy Spirit moves us in the present.

It’s hard to define creative living, but it’s connected to newness, to not being rigid or stubborn. It’s becoming; renewing; growing. It’s especially connected to love. ▶

Letter from the Prioress

During the 50 days of Easter this year I have adopted this practice: each day I choose awareness of an event



in which I am experiencing something new and unexpected. In this way I am celebrating the Resurrection of

Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB

Jesus to life, focusing on the new life surrounding me, and resisting temptation to dwell on gloom and darkness.

For example, I have remembered that just five years ago Francis was elected Pope, bringing new life to so many people's experience and understanding of the Church!

I also remember the response of thousands of high school students in March to the recent school violence. Have they stirred up energy for real change toward serious gun control? It appears so.

As I look out my office window and see nature coming to life, I am reminded of the opening lines of a poem by Robinson Jeffers "Is it not by his high superfluosness we know our God?" What extravagance! "...not even the weeds to multiply without blossom nor the birds without music."

As disciples of Jesus, we are witnesses to His transforming presence within and among us now. The Spirit of God is even now creating something new!

Let us renew our commitment to use our creative energies to build the Kingdom of God. Happy Eastertide! Alleluia!!

"Learning is the benefit of creativity," Sister Helen says. "You do that by listening, which is at the heart of it. And the point is love."

Music is like incense. It lifts our prayers to God. - Therese Fleischman St. Ledger, St. Mary's Academy Class of 1954

Plant the Seed, and Wait Sister Mary Jane Wallace, OSB

Everybody has a gift, and everybody's is different. Mine is music, although it has changed over time.

I used to be able to play difficult pieces on the piano. My hands are too arthritic now to play what I once did. I could be discouraged about it, but thinking about it makes me rejoice and smile. I used to be able to do it. Thank God!

Today, I play easier pieces that refresh my inner spirits. I'm happy that I can share my enthusiasm and knowledge with others.

Our society is push-button. We have no patience for learning, yet we need it to create.

Whether we are sculpting, painting, gardening or making a friend, we need to teach ourselves to be patient and gentle. Plant the seed, and wait.

The act or art of creating does expand our souls. - Lois Fister Steele, St. Mary's Academy Class of 1957

The Gift of God's Presence Sister Margaret Murphy, OSB

By choosing to use our God-given gifts to create, we act and grow in the image of God. We are one with all creation.

Creativity is a way to grow in our ability to see as God sees. It allows us to grow in God's likeness.

We can be creative as we go for walks. We can see mandalas everywhere, for instance, in spider ►



Sister Margaret Murphy shares a design she calls, "Love Grows." She suggests spending time each day doing something that puts us in touch with the Creator within.



Poet Naomi Shihab Nye says, “You are living in a poem.” Whether we create that poem through gardening, like Sister Claudia Scharf, or follow other paths, do what Sister Mary Jane Wallace says will “give you the feeling of ‘I love this.’”

webs, in a wind-formed whirl of leaves.

We can be creative as we take what’s already here and create with it. We can create new ways of doing things. We can create new things using recycled materials.

Even coloring in adult coloring books, which is so popular in the culture now, is creative.

There are many ways to create. Gardening, sketching, coloring, playing piano, writing.

It’s not the skill you have, it’s the creating you do. Spend a little time each day creating. It will nurture you and put you in touch with the Creator within.

Creating is a manifestation of God in us. – Sister Mary Alexia Walters, OSB

The Divine Working Within Us Sister Marianne Burkhard, OSB

The Holy Spirit is always doing things within. Most of my writing is academic, but there comes a time when I have to figure out how it works together.

I have to sit and brood about it sometimes. Suddenly, I realize it should go this way! The Holy Spirit has worked in me. It is true for the short psalm reflections I do for our Facebook page, too.

It’s wonderful when something comes together, whether a sentence or a chapter.

For me, it’s much more the work of the Holy Spirit. It’s the Divine working within us.

What can we do that leaves us with the strongest sense of sailing true

north and of peace, which is much of what gladness is? – Frederick Buechner

Creative versus Destructive Sister Mary Core, OSB

The atomic bomb took a creative mind to come up with it. But its destructive purpose negated goodness. The intended purpose of what we create counts.

God is not part of what’s destructive. Intention is key.

We must ask ourselves if we can enter into this creating in a positive way, or if what we do diminishes creation – and ourselves – in the process.

Creating music connects me to a higher being. – Mary Beth Kapp Palmquist St. Mary’s Academy Class of 1966 ▶



Sister Stefanie MacDonald encourages creativity in her preschoolers.

Centering the Heart

Sister Stefanie MacDonald, OSB

Music has always centered me. If things are going sideways, music re-grounds me. It's a wonderful emotional outlet.

When I play, the music goes beyond me and my skill. God is there, too.

Even in my worst moments, it keeps me in God's presence, giving me peace and calming me. I love to share it in the hope it helps bring others closer to God, too.

Whether I play or listen, music is a graced moment, like connecting in the soul with God. (Sr. Stefanie also enjoys coloring. Her picture graces the cover of this issue.)

Poetry and art are not about answers to me; they are about questions. – Lucille Clifton

Creating a Response in Others

Sister Sheila McGrath, OSB

I enjoy working with clay. It's a very focused activity, because attention must be given to it or it will not turn out well.

Working with clay, it's unknown how it will turn out. There are always surprises. Each piece is unique.

That's like God working in our lives. We don't know what they – the clays or our lives – will look like. We are all made of the same stuff, but each of us will turn out unique. Surprises are part of the process.

Forming clay takes a constant, gentle touch. That's another parallel, because God's touch in our lives is always there, always ▶



Sister Sheila McGrath uses the pen and business card holders she made.

Sister Catherine Maloney displays an Easter decoration she and some other Sisters created for the healthcare doors.



gentle, always marking our lives. Whatever we create continues to create, whether a piece of art, poetry, photograph, conversation or home. It creates response in others.

Art would not be important if life were not important, and life is important. – James Baldwin

Gratitude, the Creative Response Sister Catherine Maloney, OSB

I miss doing needlepoint. It helped me get in touch with my gift for making people happy. I never did a project without having some deeper reason for doing it. But I find as I get older that I can still be grateful for having been able to do it once. I'm grateful for the friendships it helped create.

I also realize more and more how people rely on my praying for them. Someone called the other day and said, "Sister, your prayers were answered." To realize that God is working in me does something for me, too. It keeps me less self-centered and more appreciative.

I also appreciate the gift of memory. Memories help keep creativity in life going. I could reflect on the negative – everyone has negatives in life – but the positive memories keep one growing.

My younger gift of material creating – needlepoint – helped pave the way for today's gift of gratitude. I'm grateful for the past and that I'm still able to share my gifts with others. *You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have. – Maya Angelou*

Saying "Yes" to Life

The question, then, is how – not whether – we create. Do we create with intention and enthusiasm, or by default? Do we lean into our God-given nature as co-creators, or do we let life happen to us?

To embrace a creative life is to live fully, to say yes to life's mystery and surprises. To pray, as e e cummings, "i thank You God for most this amazing/day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees/and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything/which is natural which is infinite which is yes."

Happy Spring!



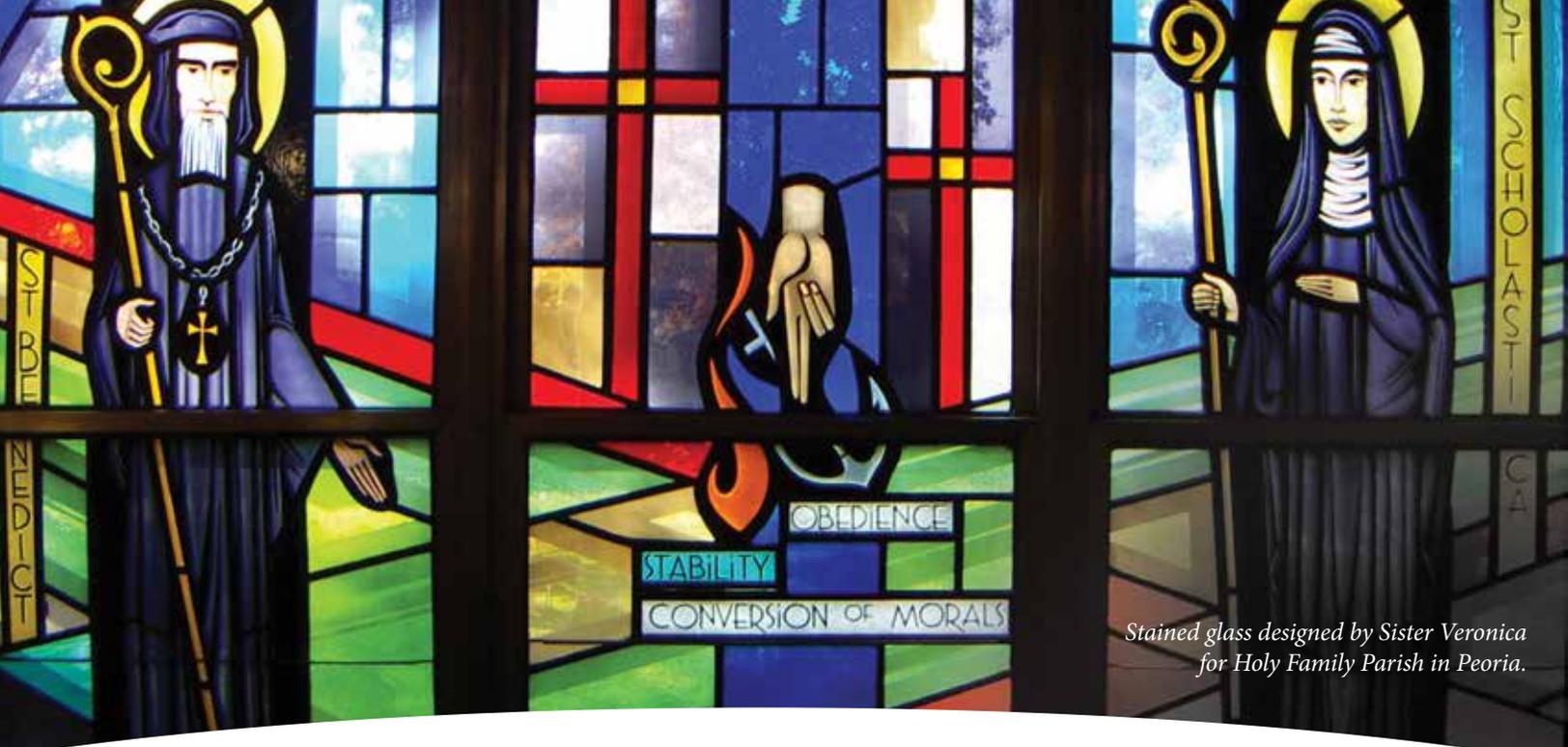
i thank You God for most this amazing day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes

(i who have died am alive again today, and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth day of life and love and wings and of the gay great happening illimitably earth)

how should tasting touching hearing seeing breathing any-lifted from the no of all nothing-human merely being doubt unimaginable You?

(now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

e e cummings



Stained glass designed by Sister Veronica for Holy Family Parish in Peoria.

Called Forth: A Creative, Intense, Courageous Response

Excerpted from Sister Veronica Shunick's address to the National Honor Society in 1976

On one of those windy spring afternoons this past week, I was sitting by the window in my room watching the rapidly changing formations of clouds in the sky. The sun was lowering in the west so the newly budded elm was silhouetted in the finest filigree against the sunlight.

I was struck by the fact that although I have witnessed hundreds of sunsets, I was witnessing something unique and different. It had never looked exactly like this before and never would again.

The strange thing about it was that I could have said that about every other sunset I had ever seen!

This mystery of God creating can be looked upon also as calling forth.

This calling forth invites a response. Let us think about this in relation to ourselves, our being called forth and our response.

As we begin our lives, we are not finished products. We are only rough sketches of ourselves ... (called to become).

To become. What does it really mean? Becoming implies change – movement forward. It suggests openness – an openness to reality, to all that is reality for us. ...

It implies a getting better – not staying the same, no matter how comfortable. Becoming means saying yes over and over again.

Although becoming is positive, any forward movement meets with resistance. In fact, we can expect that the more important the movement forward is, the greater the force resisting it will be.

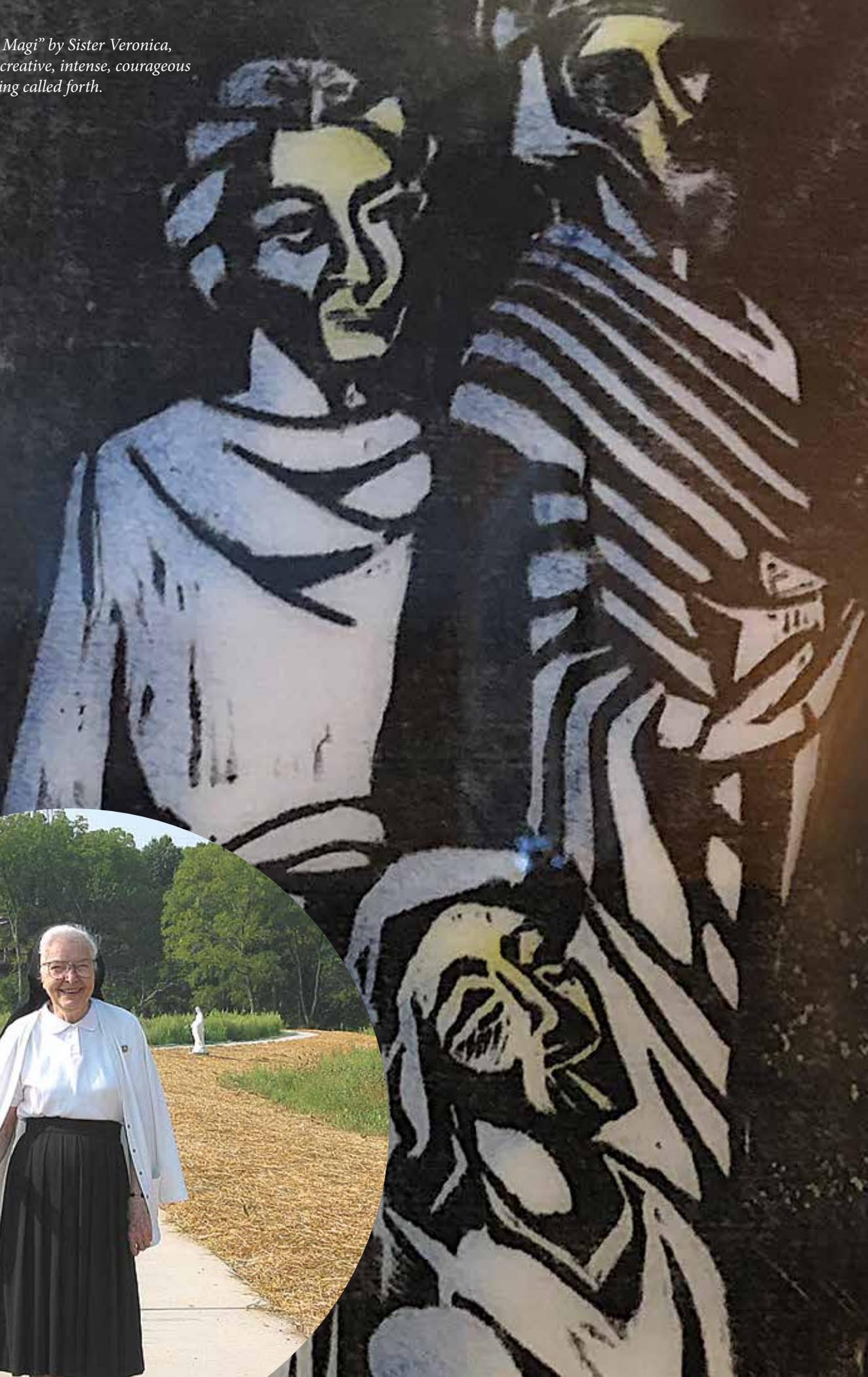
Becoming is not easy! ... (It is about) living vital, vibrant, creative lives, or being marginal people – people on the edge, afraid to come to grips with life. ...

(It is about) reaching deep within ourselves to see the beauty there and sharing it with others. ...

It is about Spring. Nature has been called forth. We have been called forth. Our response must be creative, intense, courageous.

Sister Veronica Shunick, OSB (1923-2009), enjoyed spending time outdoors, often taking a walk around the monastery lake.

*Detail of "The Magi" by Sister Veronica,
a study in the creative, intense, courageous
response to being called forth.*





Sister Sandra Brunenn, left, views the Saint John's Bible.

Photo courtesy Jen Willems, Catholic Post.

Monastery Notes

Holy Reading, Seeing with the Saint John's Bible

Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, MN commissioned the first handwritten and illuminated Bible in hundreds of years. Calling it "a work of art and theology," the Abbey website says the Bible is the result of "a team of artists in Wales and a team of scholars in Central Minnesota who brought together the ancient techniques of calligraphy and illumination with an ecumenical Christian approach to the Bible rooted in Benedictine spirituality."

A replica of a portion of that Bible is now on display at Illinois Wesleyan University. Benedictine Oblates, Sisters and monks gathered with members of the university and public to kick off a year of activities celebrating it in January, 2018. Sister Sandra Brunenn was asked to participate in the blessing of the Bible. Following are excerpts from her reflection.

Our Benedictine tradition has always placed primacy on the Holy Scriptures. Monks were the early calligraphers, illuminators, and preservers of the Sacred Texts. In the Middle Ages the monasteries were centers of culture and learning that kept the tradition of scriptural reading alive for the whole world.

How appropriate it is, then, that Benedictines are continuing this tradition with the technology and vision of today and thus illuminating the Word of God for a new millennium.

This love of the Sacred Scriptures holds central place in the Rule of Benedict, as the Scriptures are not simply to be revered, or studied, or learned by heart, but prayed day in and day out.

At the heart of Benedictine spirituality is the practice of holy reading or *Lectio Divina*. It is

reading not for information, but rather for formation, and indeed transformation.

We are encouraged to listen with the ear of the heart, to read Scripture slowly and with openness to hearing God's call today.

The Saint John's Bible with its beautiful calligraphy and illuminations invites us into this practice of both holy reading and holy seeing, or *visio divina*.

The various illuminations are not simply illustrations; rather they are spiritual meditations on the texts. They spark our imaginations and invite us to see the Scriptures themselves with new eyes.

As you spend time with the various passages in this Bible, you will notice that the images illuminate the Word, and the ▶

Word illuminates the image. The two work together to open our hearts and minds to God's transforming presence right now. The Benedictine Oblates of St Mary Monastery have helped share the Bible with the larger community here. We see it as a gift of our tradition to be shared as widely and deeply as we can envision.

Don't miss your opportunity throughout the year to spend time with it.

Benedictine News

Several Sisters attended the 2017 Pacem in Terris Award and Freedom Award ceremonies at Christ the King Chapel, St. Ambrose University, Davenport, IA. The award was given to Dr. Widad Akreyi, a Danish health expert, author and human rights activist of Kurdish ancestry who cofounded the human rights organization, Defend International.

Sister Susan Hutchens, Treasurer, and Jennifer Carber, our Finance Director, attended the Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI) Conference in St. Louis, MO from October 31 to November 3, 2017.

Sister Susan and Jennifer also attended a meeting of the Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment.

Sister Marlene Miller, House Coordinator, attended the fall meeting of the Roundtable in Dubuque, IA.

Sister Bobbi Bussan traveled to Rome to plan the CIB (Commission of Benedictine Women) Symposium in Rome to be held in September, 2018. Sister Bobbi serves as the CIB Symposium Planning Coordinator.

Sister Charlotte Sonnevile was the featured speaker at the annual retreat for women hosted by the Rock Island/Milan Church Women United. Her topic was "Hidden Women in the Bible."

Sister Sandra Brunenn attended the annual meeting of Benedictine Prioresses held at Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, AL, February 1 – 7, 2018. Highlights included a presentation on issues related to the development of archives in our communities, opportunities for building relationships, and a closing Mardi Gras celebration complete with a live Jazz Band.

Julie Kelemen has begun her six-month stay at the monastery as a Live-In Volunteer. Julie comes from Kalamazoo, MI.



From left, Sisters Andrea Giltner and Cecile Baer celebrated their 70th anniversary, and Sisters Ruth Ksycki and Marilyn Roman celebrated their 60th anniversary. They renewed their vows during Vespers March 10, 2018. A festive meal was enjoyed by all following Vespers.



Members of Class of 1952 met at Good's Furniture Store, Kewanee, IL, for lunch on October 21, 2017. From left to right: Yvonne Gill Bogner, Ruth DeDecker Cambron, Donna Robinson Johnson, JoAnn Barnes Palmer, Rose Benedict Hayes.

St. Mary's Academy News

Alumnae Remember Sisters' Kindness

Jesus told us to love one another unconditionally, "even as I have loved you." We invited SMA alumnae to share how they witnessed this love from the Sisters. Here are excerpts of the responses. For more, visit smmsisters.org/whats-new.

Rose Anne (Tanner) Shansky, '62: I began in the Fall of 1952 when I was in second grade. The "little girls" slept in a large room in the old Academy building. Our prefect was Sister Jerome (Rosemary Murphy), who slept in the same room in a curtained-off corner. One night I couldn't sleep and I went to that curtained area and told her. She took me back to bed, tucked me in and sat down on the bed next to me. She suggested I might be able to fall asleep if I practiced my multiplication tables. So we began. "Two times one is two, two times two is four..." After the first set, I said, "Well, I know the twos all right, but I'm really scared I don't know the threes." So we went on. Sr. Jerome never appeared impatient or tired. She just sat by my side until I got sleepy; a warm, nurturing presence.

Mary Ann Messer, '67: I remember marching in very white Nauvoo, IL on a Sunday afternoon in 1965 with Sister Marilyn Ring. We sang, "We shall overcome!" Then there was Sister Ambrose (Sister Kathleen Aubry) whose mantra could have been *Choose Kindness*. Sister Joan' Kupfert, our Principal, along with so many other Sisters, like Gabriel, Sean, John Marie (Margaret Suerth), Dolores, Clare, Gregory, Helen Carey, Thomas, and Antonia (Katherine Keogel) used their time, talents and treasure to preach the Gospel and – if necessary – used words!

Laura Gallagher, '80: The Sisters created a sense of community and stability by acting upon Christ's love. I now live these values in my classroom, my home and in my community.

Carolyn Lutz, '60: I started 7th grade apprehensively. But Sister Dolores was so cheerful – calling me *Merry Sunshine* – that I felt accepted. The Sisters used positive reinforcement to teach the values that I still hold dear today. In so many words or actions, they told us we were good, and so we tried to live up to their impressions of us.

Kathy Craig, '62: I confided to Sister Virginia that I didn't get along with my mother. I was embarrassed about it because I assumed all the others had great home lives, but I told her because I didn't want to misrepresent myself

as a “good girl.” I thought somehow that I was guilty. Sr. Virginia told me that a lot of girls didn’t get along with their mothers. She helped me realize that my problem wasn’t unique or something to be ashamed of.

Lois Fister Steele, ‘57: The Sisters were my guiding star during a transition period of my life. They were and are inspiring.

Linda Haas, ‘67: I remember Sister Sheila McGrath’s gentle, kind, supportive presence. I loved Sister Helen Carey and could see how intelligent she was. Later, I was impressed that this well-educated woman who’d earned her PhD treated me as a peer and a friend.

Carol Morris, ‘62: Many of the Sisters impacted my life. Sister Gregory’s unspoken message was, “You are worth my time.” Wonderful Sister Ambrose (Kathleen Aubry) was so talented at math and art, so kind to us. Sister Patrick always had a smile and a twinkle in her eye. I also had a wonderful “big sister” – (Sister) Marlene Miller. How is this like Jesus? We are called to be kind and helpful, to be joyful and grateful for our blessings. We are okay just the way God made us. God (and the Sisters) will love us no matter what we are going through on our earthly journey!

Betsy O’Meara McNeil, ‘86: SMA was our home. The Sisters acted as mothers, fathers, psychologists, mentors and teachers without ever asking anything in return other than our own self love and respect. I am forever

In Memoriam ...

Emily Loftus Gallivan, ‘63, died Feb., 2018.

The husband of **Bonnie Preuss Viviano, ‘58,** died recently, joining their daughter who died in 2011.

Ray, husband of **Kathy Mulligan Bailey, ‘74,** died Jan. 6, 2018.

Father of **Margaret Mary Dabe, ‘78,** died Feb. 2018.

Jeannie Wilson Fortado, ‘64, died Nov. 7, 2017.

Virginia Kratz Alban, ‘54, died Nov. 27, 2017.

Tom Castrey, son of **Mary Cupp Castrey, ‘54,** died Dec. 22, 2017.

Ann Modlin Mitchell, ‘42, died in Dec. 2017. Sisters include **Regina, ‘56, Betty, ‘50, Jane, ‘46, Kay, ‘52, Mary, 44.**

Judy Wyffels Ahern, 62, sister of **Joan, ‘60, Janice, ‘64** and **Joyce, ‘69,** died Jan. 2, 2018.

Don, husband of **Carolyn Laurenti Judge, ‘60,** died.

Marianne Dempsey, ‘48, died in 2017.

Reunion Announcements

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!



Connecting Point
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