

Celebrating 145 Years! Honoring Our Past . . . Looking to the Future



**Connecting
Point**



Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB
Prioress

145 Years . . . Honoring Our History Looking to the Future

Nestled on more than 80 acres of Illinois farmlands, St. Mary Monastery sits on a hill overlooking the beautiful meadows of Rock Island County. More than 160 years ago, the first Benedictine women to settle in North America arrived at St. Marys, Pennsylvania, in 1852 from Eichstätt, Bavaria. From there grew the community of St. Scholastica in Chicago, Illinois who sent sisters to Nauvoo, Illinois to open St. Mary's Academy, a school for girls.

The Sisters of St. Benedict devoted their ministry to education, and their fidelity to the Benedictine life that began in the 6th century continues today. Mother Ottilia Hoeweler, the first Prioress of St. Mary Monastery, moved with three other sisters and one postulant from Chicago to Nauvoo in 1874. After 123 years in Nauvoo, St. Mary Academy closed in 1997. Following prayerful discernment, the community voted to move and build a monastery and retreat center in the Quad Cities. At the Rock Island location, visitors can attend Lauds, Vespers or Eucharist in the monastery chapel, walk the monastery grounds and attend programs in the Benet House Retreat Center.

With the relocation to Rock Island complete, the sisters launched new ministries offering spiritual guidance and retreats, teaching in local schools, helping to provide housing for homeless women and children, supporting religious education programs for those with special needs, establishing interfaith dialogues and serving the needs of the hungry in Rock Island.

In 2015, St. Mary Monastery began a strategic planning process, exploring how to share the Gospel and vision of St. Benedict in new ways. The process included members from the monastery's broader community of relationships including oblates, community leaders and friends of the monastery.

Leaning on more than 1,500 years of Benedictine history and a proven ability to adapt to changing times, the planning process began. Prioress Sandra Brunenn shares, "As the needs of our community were changing, we wanted to strengthen and build our web of relationships – with our alumnae, employees, oblates and volunteers as well as others in the local area".



The goal was to examine the present realities of St. Mary Monastery, and to explore how to focus the community's energies to be a vital presence moving into the future.

As a result of this planning process, the community sharpened its focus on the values of St. Mary Monastery. These five Benedictine Values are Prayer, Community, Hospitality, Peace and Justice and Care of Creation.

St. Sandra continues, "Even as our world is constantly changing, our Benedictine mission remains unchanged, and our values are more relevant than ever. We will focus on one value each year, beginning with Prayer in 2020."

Using the skills and gifts of the community today, the Benedictine Sisters of St. Mary Monastery reflect a vitality and unwavering commitment to share the Gospel and their mission with others. Make plans soon to come visit us. Our hearts are open!



That in all things God may be glorified

Dreams Are Possible!

Creating Better Lives through Building Trades

The Dreams Are Possible training center, a vision of Mary Campbell opens in December at the former location of A.G. Erickson Groceries & Meats on Olive Street in Bloomington, Illinois. Campbell, a retired social work faculty member from Illinois State University (ISU), partnered with St. Mary Monastery Oblate Feli Sebastian, a psychologist from Bloomington to create a place that will assist area women who are working hard, but have limited skills and are stuck in jobs that don't pay well. "Our mission is to prepare women for economically sustainable employment by providing hands-on skills so they can earn a living wage with benefits and transition to careers where they are treated with dignity in the workplace," said Sebastian.

Currently, women represent less than 5% of jobs in the building trades, yet these jobs typically pay well and include benefits. "We created this training center to bridge that gap, because women traditionally don't consider work in the building trades," said Campbell.

The Illinois Laborers and Contractors Joint Apprenticeship and Training Program facility supports the mission. Terrance Whitecotton, facility manager and apprenticeship coordinator says, "This is a wonderful opportunity to help train women so they can apply for the trades and earn a good living wage to support their families".

Campbell and Sebastian, with the help of Hank Campbell, designed the training center in two parts. One section includes an area for children to play or study while their mothers attend training. The remainder of the building includes a classroom, computer room and a large laboratory where women are trained in skills like drywall installation, door and window hanging, pipe fitting and blue print reading.

In total, over \$90,000 was needed to acquire and renovate the building. The building was purchased using private donations, then Campbell and Sebastian used a variety of community resources to raise funds and complete renovations. Home Depot provided \$10,400 in a grant for construction materials, installed new flooring in the building and helped pave the handicap back entrance.

Volunteers, including Youth Build and ISU students, began the renovation to remove the flooring, old dry walls and furnaces. Busey Bank employees and staff from ISU's Admissions Office stained the deck and back stairs, scrubbed bricks, painted the front steps and landscaped the backyard.

A team of high school students from the Youth Global Citizen (YGC) program raised \$2,220 by selling raffle tickets, homemade coasters and kitchen towels and an evening at Jason's Deli. The group also sponsored an afternoon of history about A.G. Erickson and the Swedish community, including Erickson's significant contribution to the community. Before completing their service, the team painted a mural on the Dreams Are Possible training center depicting women carrying tools to reflect the vision that women can successfully work in building trades.

"There is a need for more women in the building trades, and the women we do have are some of our best workers," said Rich Veitengruber, president of the Livingston and McLean Counties Building and Construction Trades Council.

Sebastian and Campbell are grateful for the strong community support, the generous donors, and the volunteers who have joined their vision to help women in Bloomington create better lives through building trades. "By investing in these women, we are investing in their children and our community," said Sebastian. ***Congratulations to our Oblate Feli Sebastian!***



Waiting in Joyful Hope Published

We know Sister Susan Hutchens, OSB, as a beloved Sister and Treasurer of St. Mary Monastery. Professed for 44 years, she also serves as community organizer. St. Mary Monastery's 2019 Oblate Day featured Sister Susan speaking on the topic of "Waiting in Joyful Hope", a presentation that was originally given at St. Bernard Abbey, Cullman, Alabama, to the Joint Conference of Abbots and Prioresses of Benedictine Congregations and Federations based in America. The presentation has been published in this month's [Benedictines Magazine](#).



*Photo by
Mosaic Collective LLC*

Sr. Mary Core Celebrates 50th Jubilee

Sister Mary Core was born in Sterling, Illinois on April 4, 1948 and grew up on a farm in Tampico, Illinois. Her parents, Darrell and Anna Jane Core, gave Mary and her four siblings a rich German and Catholic heritage filled with love, prayer and hard work.



Drawn to religious life from an early age, Sister Mary was praying in her dorm room during her freshman year of college. “I asked God for a sign to confirm my calling to religious life. During my prayer on a clear December day, beautiful snow began to fall, and I knew it was from God,” Sister Mary said. She made her first profession of vows on June 21, 1969, and her final profession of vows on August 12, 1972 at St. Mary Priory, Nauvoo, Illinois. Sister Mary earned her BA in Theology and English from St. Xavier University, Chicago; and her Master of Theological Studies from St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, St. Meinrad, Indiana; and a certificate of religious education of adolescents from the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio.



A longtime educator, Sister Mary served in many different cities throughout the state of Illinois. In the Diocese of Peoria, Sister Mary taught at Sts. Peter and Paul School in Macomb, Immaculate Conception School in Monmouth, St. Mary Academy in Nauvoo, where she was also a dorm prefect, Peoria Notre Dame High School in Peoria, and St. Bede Academy in Peru, where she was also the service program coordinator. She was director of religious education and youth minister at St. Joseph in Pekin and youth director at St. Maria Goretti in Coal Valley and Mary, Our Lady of Peace in Orion.



Youth ministry brought Sister Mary great joy. “I found the youth to be genuine, challenging and willing to help others. Doing service trips always became a time of enrichment and restored my faith in the goodness of our youth.” Sister Mary served her community as Vocation Director from 1993 to 1997 and Initial Formation Director from 2005 to 2012. Prior to serving as Initial Formation Director, Sister Mary was Youth Minister for Our Lady of Victory Parish in Davenport, Iowa. She has been involved in liturgy at the monastery since 2005 and has led the book group at St. Maria Goretti in Coal Valley and Mary, Our Lady of Peace in Orion since 2012.

As Sister Mary reflects on these past 50 years, she is grateful for the support of her community, family, students and friends. She remains hopeful about the future as she observes youth taking leadership roles in climate change and care of the earth activities and breaking down the barriers of racism, sexism and prejudice. To honor her 50th Jubilee, Sister Mary celebrated in June with a Jubilee Mass and dinner with her community, family and friends.

Experiencing Monastic Life: A Volunteer Live-in Opportunity

Beginning in 2018, St. Mary Monastery initiated a volunteer program that allows individuals to spend time in a monastic community with the intent to deepen their relationship with God through prayer and work. After learning about the program, Oblate Lori Carroll applied and was thrilled to be accepted into the program. Lori shares her experience of the live-in program below:

“I arrived at the monastery with bags in hand, feeling a bit like Maria in ‘The Sound of Music.’ Sister Marlene greeted me warmly in the Welcome Area and showed me to my room. I was excited to begin my adventure, and my primary duties included playing the organ for Lauds, Vespers and Eucharist, in addition to gardening.

Born in Iowa but raised in upstate New York, I attended Iowa State University for college and then marriage. Over 38 years, I taught music in five Iowa school districts, in addition to being a church musician since the age of 10. Several years ago, I participated in a concert at St. Mary Monastery, and fell in love with the chapel, both aesthetically and acoustically. The floor-to-ceiling windows with a sweeping view of the monastery grounds provide an instant connection to God and nature.

Recently I retired from teaching, and I haven’t needed to set a morning alarm, but I have needed to get up earlier than usual to play for 6:30 a.m. Lauds. Playing the organ for Lauds has now become a cherished event in my day. I’ve enjoyed reading How to Live by Judith Valente, and her words resonate with me: *‘There is something deeply humbling about interrupting our sleep to stand with others in prayer. We become part of something larger than ourselves’.*

Living at the monastery has provided extended periods of time enjoying the grounds. Walking down to the lake one night, I spotted a deer standing on the path about 20 yards ahead of me, snacking on some tree leaves. I tried to be perfectly still, but the deer soon noticed me and leapt gracefully over a bank of wildflowers towards the woods.



“As many of you already know, St. Mary Monastery is a place of peace and love, an oasis in a troubled world.

Being a live-in volunteer can be a gift to our beloved Sisters, and to yourself.”

OBLATE LORI CARROLL

Connecting Point Briefs

Lights for Liberty

Several sisters joined over 100 people at a solidarity rally to protest the treatment of immigrants at our border, especially children. The event was held at Mercado on 5th Street in Moline, and the event ended with candles lit as a reminder to stand together and protest the treatment of immigrants at the border.

Feast of St. Benedict

The sisters celebrated the Feast of St. Benedict with a vigil on July 10th. On the feast day, they gathered for Mass followed by an afternoon movie and festive dinner.

National Association of Oblate Directors

The biennial conference of the National American Association of Oblate Directors (NAABOD) was held at St. Benedict Center, Schuyler, NE on July 5-9, 2019. Sister Ruth Ksycki, Oblate Director and Oblates Lori Carroll and Sue Hauptert attended. The conference theme was “Continuing the Sacred Tradition: Benedictine Spirituality Today and Tomorrow”.

Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR) Assembly

The 2019 LCWR assembly met in Scottsdale August 13-16 with almost 800 in attendance. This gathering of women religious leaders explored ways to learn and practice leadership during this unique era in religious life. The members also wrote a letter to President Trump calling him to end all divisive and polarizing rhetoric. Sr. Sandra Brunenn and Sr. Sheila McGrath attended the conference to represent St. Mary Monastery.

Retreat Directors Conference

Sr. Bobbi Bussan, Director of Benet House Retreat Center, attended “Sustaining the Gift: Benedictine Retreat Ministry,” sponsored by the Association of Benedictine Retreat Centers (ABRC) held August 19 – 22. This bi-annual conference was held at the Benedictine Inn and Conference Center in Beech Grove, Indiana. Sr. Bobbi serves as Chair of the ABRC that includes 20 retreat centers from across the country. The 2021 Conference will be hosted at Benet House.

Exploring Race and Culture in America

Sr. Marianne Burkhard and Sr. Mary Core attended an “Exploring Race and Culture in America” conference at the Chautauqua Institution in New York. The conference offered lectures to enrich the understanding of Black contributions to American culture, in addition to prayer opportunities and music by famed Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis.

Women’s Interfaith Dialogue

Several sisters attended an interfaith dialogue at Temple Emanuel in Davenport. The group is organized by Muslim, Jewish and Catholic women, and this year’s topic is “From Faith to Action”. After meetings concluded, the women filled backpacks with toiletries to be distributed to the homeless in the Quad Cities area.



Sister Catherine Maloney attends Blue Mass at Sacred Heart Church in Rock Island for the blessing of Catholic Care Packs.

Reunion Announcements

Class of 1975: March 27, 28, 29, 2020

Class of 1985: July 24, 25, 26, 2020

Class of 1970: August 28, 29, 30, 2020

Class of 1962: Sept 18, 19, 20, 2020

Class of 1959: October 9, 10, 11, 2020



Members of the Class of 1954 gathered at Biaggi's in Bloomington to celebrate their 65th class reunion: Therese Fleischman St. Ledger, Alice Cokel Clark, Elaine Bart Smith, Sister Mary Schmidt, and Barbara Flaherty Jensen. Not pictured but with us in spirit: Mary Cupp Castrey and Sister Margaret Murphy.

In Memoriam . . .

Art Adkisson, husband of **Diane Woods '65** died April 11, 2019.

Jim Castrey, husband of **Mary Cupp '54** and father of **Debbie Castrey-King '74** died May 14, 2019.

Jeff Cawley, husband of **Liz Goeke '62** died May 27, 2019.

Joan Cook, '48 and sister of alum, **Irma Spaeth '50** died June 26, 2019.

Barbara Steele Filson, '54 died August 28, 2019.

Rich Koch, father of **Deidre '90; Una '92** and **Nuala '94** died June 5, 2019.

Mary Markey, '63 died February 22, 2019.

Floyd McDonald, father of **Cathy and Carol McDonald, '75** died.

Patricia Ducey Murphy, '45 died May 7, 2019.

Jeanne Cain Schumacher, mother to **Donna '67; Julie '68; Sharon '70; Beth '71; Anne '79** and sister to **Rita '50; Pat '48** (deceased); **Mary Pat '46** and **Sheila '53** died April 15, 2019.

Paul Thurston, son **Rosalind Moore Thurston '61** died.

Ernesto Toledo, father of **Teta Toledo, '95** died.



Benet House

Ongoing Programs

Bookmarks: Henri Nouwen Reading Group (1st Tuesdays Sept - June)

Break-a-way Day of Prayer and Quiet (1st Wednesdays Sept - June)

The Word Among Us (Mondays January 13 & 27)

December Programs

Bookmarks: Henri Nouwen Reading Group (Tues, Dec 3)

Centering Prayer (Wednesdays Dec 11 and 18)

Taize (Thursday Dec 12)

Retreats

Veteran's Retreat: Compassion to Self - A 24-Hour Retreat (Friday, Dec 6 - Sat, Dec 7)

Silent Directed Retreat: John Testifies About Jesus (Sun, Jan 19 - Wed, Jan 22)

Prayer and Poetry - A 24-Hour Retreat (Fri, Feb 7 - Sat, Feb 8)

We Remember

Centering Prayer Scholarship established for Sister Audrey Cleary



Sr. Audrey Cleary, OSB

Sister Audrey Cleary, OSB, passed away peacefully on December 31, 2018 at St. Mary Monastery. In response to the many donations received following her funeral, the monastery established a Centering Prayer scholarship fund in honor of Sister Audrey for Benet House retreats.

Sister Audrey was introduced to Centering Prayer through a workshop at St. Mary Monastery in Nauvoo, given by Thomas Keating, OSB, who initiated the Centering Prayer movement. She facilitated workshops and retreats at Holy Trinity Parish, St. Mary Monastery, and parishes in Central Illinois.

After establishing several Centering Prayer communities in the Midwest, Sister Audrey affiliated St. Mary Monastery's Centering Prayer groups with the Central Illinois Contemplative Outreach (CO) community. The Bloomington Centering Prayer group has continued to meet for over twenty-five years, and has grown into 15 faithful groups in Central Illinois.

“If this is of Audrey, it will die, but if this is of God, it will thrive.”

SISTER AUDREY CLEARY, OSB

Prioress Sandra Brunenn shares, “Sister Audrey’s Centering Prayer ministry left a significant impact in Central Illinois, and the groups are still thriving today”. Sister Audrey will be remembered for her love of God and her love for her Benedictine community, family and all she served.

Sister Marilyn Ring, OSB 1930 - 2019



Sr. Marilyn Ring, OSB

Sister Marilyn (Mary Stephen) Ring, OSB, died Sunday, Sept. 15 at the monastery. Born in Marshalltown, IA, Sr. Marilyn entered the Benedictine community in September 1948 and made her final profession June 24, 1955. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Illinois, and a Master of Arts from the University of Notre Dame.

A longtime teacher and campus minister, her service included teaching at St. Joseph, Ivesdale, IL, St. Roch’s School, LaSalle, IL, St. Mary’s Academy, Nauvoo, IL, Campus Ministry at the University of Illinois, Champaign, IL, and the Illinois State University, Normal, IL, Parish Ministry Mercer County, IL., Campus Ministry at Augustana College, Rock Island, IL, and Associate Campus Chaplain at Augustana College, Rock Island, IL.



Back Row (left to right): Belinda Monahan, Becky Mathauer, Rachel Geracitano, Roxanne Higgins, Jackie Leiter, Kathy Cash. Front: Michelle Sinkhorn, Stefanie MacDonald, Kimberly Porter

Vocations Focus on Under 55

Sr. Stefanie Encourages a Helping Spirit

Mr. Fred Rogers once shared, “When I was young and would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping”. Helpers give us hope, and with the growing unrest in our world, it’s easier than ever to spot the helpers.

Catholic Sisters devote their lives to helping others. Within our own community at St. Mary Monastery, every sister has countless examples of helping others in need. Below are a few examples of ways we have helped those in need.

Sister Margaret Suerth created a shelter for the homeless in LaSalle/Peru including mattresses, linens, pillows and kitchen supplies. She worked tirelessly for 13 years to care for those in need.

Organizing meal providers at St. Joseph was how **Sister Germaine Cupp** demonstrated her love for the hungry in Rock Island. Today, the sisters at St. Mary Monastery still prepare and serve a meal once a month at the Rock Island Township Hall.

The Special Persons Encounter Christ (SPEC) program provides religious education opportunities for those with special needs. With the help of **Sister Cecile Baer** and several other sisters, the program which started in 1975 at Christ the King Church is still in operation today.

Sister Bobbi Bussan saw a need to provide housing and support to women and children, and helped reopen the St. Joseph House for Homeless Women and Children in 2006. In addition to housing, the ministry helps women find employment, secure childcare and promote education for women in need.

More recently, St. Mary Monastery is collaborating with the Moline and Rock Island police departments to collect supplies and package Catholic Care Packs (C.C.P.) for the homeless. **Sister Catherine Maloney** leads this effort with assistance from other sisters.

Every Catholic Sister carries their own story of helping during times of great need. On Nov. 16 – 17 St. Mary Monastery will be hosting a Come and See Retreat for single Catholic women between the ages of 20 to 48.



Sisters of St. Benedict

St. Mary Monastery
2200 88th Avenue West
Rock Island, IL 61201-7649
309-283-2100 · 309-283-2200 FAX
www.smmsisters.org

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Editor
Jan Gull
jgull@smmsisters.org

www.smmsisters.org

