



The 2¢ that made a difference

Benedictine Sisters share favorite advice

“The best advice I ever got and the best I could ever give is a single word. Listen.”

– Sister Susan Hutchens, OSB

“Listen to the answer your own life makes.”

– Sister Verna Holyhead, SGS

Young Marlene had enjoyed a happy childhood, at least until now. Her days had been spent on her family’s farm, feeding the animals, hoeing the garden, helping her mom around the house.

This afternoon, however, the 9-year-old girl’s future happiness was in danger. Indeed, if her mother didn’t allow her to get what she needed immediately, life might as well end.

Marlene’s mother listened to her daughter’s urgent demand. Everyone was wearing crinolines under their fancy full skirts, at school, at ball games, everywhere. Everyone! Marlene simply had to start wearing them, too. Now!

Marlene was adamant. It was neither the first nor last time that Marlene and her mother would square off about how the child would live her life. By her own admission, Marlene was strong-willed. (“I was a sassy piece!”) But her mother was unmoved. “Dare to be different,” she replied.

The advice Marlene received that day turned out to be valuable, even if she didn’t want it then. It’s often like that with advice, though: the message that we reject is the one that becomes, over time, wisdom we cherish and share.

The following pages are filled with advice shared by Benedictine Sisters for this article.



Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB

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Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB

Letter from the Prioress

I have just returned from the annual gathering of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious in Atlanta, Georgia. This year's focus on contemplation high-lighted what is a core value for us as Benedictines.

Here at home, the hummingbirds in the tree outside my office and the prairie flowers in our front yard frequently invite me to a contemplative pause, opening my heart to wonder and awe. Our ministry at Benet House welcomes guests to enter a contemplative stance for deeper reflection. These quiet moments often provide perspective and insight that help one cope with the daily complexities of life.

I encourage you to consider how you create contemplative space in your life. If you live close by, you are welcome to join us to make a retreat, come to Liturgy of the Hours, or simply walk on our grounds.

Any of these may provide the contemplative pause that enables you to be deeply and peacefully present to all of life. Know you are always with us in spirit as we hold in our community prayer the concerns of our relatives and friends, benefactors, and the needs of our world.

Which story resonates most for you? Do you have a favorite piece of advice to share? Email us at sflansburgpr@smmsisters.org about it, and we'll share your thoughts with other readers on our blog!

Be true to yourself

Do not lean on your own understanding. - Proverbs 3

"I didn't want to be different," Sister Marlene Miller, OSB remembers. "I wanted to be just like my friends. And I let my mother know it. She told me not to follow the crowd. It was a few years before I took her advice."

Today, Sr. Marlene not only dares to be different, she gives remarkably similar advice when asked.

"Be true to yourself," Sr. Marlene, the former dean of students at the Benedictines' erstwhile St. Mary's Academy, says.

"I wrote that in scrapbooks and yearbooks to our Academy girls. I still write it in letters. It's about integrity."

Live with the question

A wise person listens to advice. - Proverbs 12

Sister Audrey Cleary, OSB listened closely when Marianne, her spiritual directee, shared a surprising and perplexing desire.

"I had become a Benedictine Oblate and found that I didn't want to leave the monastery after one of our meetings," Sister

Marianne Burkhard, OSB says.

"I told Sr. Audrey this during spiritual direction. I asked, What do I do? She said, Live with the question."

That advice gave Sr. Marianne the freedom she needed to discern her religious vocation. No pressure, no expectations, no deadlines.

She entered the community in August of 1987.

"It's good for any big decision," Sr. Marianne says.

"Living with the question over time allows you to imagine what your decision would mean. It allows you to talk it over with others. It gives you breathing space."

Live for yourself

Let every person be quick to hear. - James 1

Stefanie MacDonald was flunking out of college. The 18-year-old freshman had always struggled with school, despite being obviously



Sr. Marianne Burkhard, OSB



Enjoying a book discussion in the library, from left-to-right: Srs. Sandra Brunenn, Stefanie MacDonald, Sheila McGrath, Susan Hutchens and Jackie Walsh.

thoughtful and intelligent. Now, she wondered if she should just quit and look for a job.

Her advisor, Sister Bernadine Curoe, SVM, didn't think so.

"She had seen my papers and tests," Sister Stefanie MacDonald, OSB recalls. "She said, You're smarter than your performance indicates. Maybe Loras isn't the best school for you."

Sr. Bernadine asked her advisee if she was happy in her major.

"I admitted that I had chosen music because that's what I thought my parents wanted me to study," Sr. Stefanie says. "She said, You have to live your life for you and not for other people. Choose what makes you happy."

Sr. Bernadine's advice helped guide Stefanie into a smaller college where her learning disability was finally identified and treated. With growing confidence, she changed her major to early childhood education.

"Sr. Bernadine's advice has been my guiding light," Sr. Stefanie says.

"She helped me see that I can't make other people happy if I'm feeling miserable. She changed my life."

Forgive others ... and yourself

I will counsel you with my eye upon you. - Psalm 32

"When you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you're spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride," Frederick Buechner writes in *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith*.

"For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other's presence."

Sister Catherine Cleary agrees.

Although officially retired from her work as a spiritual director, she still sees a few directees. Her most important advice is to forgive ... even when it seems impossible.

"We are to forgive others even though they do us wrong," Sr. Catherine says. "We can only do this by plunging deeply into the love of God, by calling on God for grace, courage and strength."

"I find that it is important to tell the person, I forgive you, to say the words, even though we may not feel like forgiving them. Even though we still harbor hurt feelings. In fact, our feelings may linger, but in the depth of our hearts, in our loving God, we truly do forgive the wrong."

Holocaust author Eli Wiesel is a wonderful example, Sr. Catherine notes, of one who forgave unspeakable wrongs.

"He and his family and friends suffered horribly at the hands of the Nazis and yet he forgave," she says. "I find no matter

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Sr. Catherine Cleary, OSB



what the hurt, what the wound another afflicted, not forgiving causes an even deeper wound.”

As does not forgiving *ourselves*.

The poet John O'Donohue writes, “Although you should not erase your responsibility for the past, when you make the past your jailer, you destroy your future. It is such a great moment of liberation when you learn to forgive yourself, let the burden go, and walk out into a new path of promise and possibility.”

Don't be proud and don't compare

Listen to advice and accept instruction. - Proverbs 19

Sr. Marianne was saying goodbye to her Sisters in Nauvoo. She was excited to begin her first mission as director of religious

education at an Illinois parish, but also a little anxious. She had never done it before.

Sister Camilla Kennell, OSB gave her some advice that she has never forgotten.

“She said, Don't be proud and don't compare,” Sr. Marianne says nearly 30 years later.

“I've thought a lot about it. The first part is clear. It speaks of humility. But don't compare?”

Over the years, Sr. Marianne says she continued to mull it over. Eventually, its meaning unfolded for her.

“The more I thought about it, I realized that comparing ourselves to others often leads to envy,” she says. “We are so apt to see what we lack. We look at people who have the right color hair, the right figure, lots of money and we envy them.

“The flip side of that is that we might denigrate ourselves. We might look at those who have it all and think, there's nothing we can do right.

“Comparisons can trap us into wanting things we cannot have and not appreciating the things we do have.

“Sometimes comparisons can lead us to gratefulness, as when we recognize that we have it better than many other people.

“But there will always be things we'd love to have. So, don't compare is great advice.”

Be gentle with yourself

Blessed are those who find wisdom. - Proverbs 3

Sister Mary Jane Wallace suggests we begin to create a “new path of promise and possibility” for ourselves by



Sr. Mary Jane Wallace, OSB

treating ourselves with the kindness and compassion often reserved for others.

“We are all too critical and judgmental of ourselves,” Sr. Mary Jane says. “We grow up thinking we have to be perfect and never make mistakes. We will make mistakes.”

The advice she gives to any who ask?

“Be gentle with yourself,” she smiles. “Don’t let negative experiences dictate your response to the world. Even if you come from a home where you never heard a positive word. Say the positive to yourself now. Be your own advocate.”

Ask yourself *who* you want to be

Listen with the ear of your heart.
- St. Benedict

Sister Teresa Ann Harrington, OSB served as Junior Director when Sr. Marianne was a Junior Sister. Kind and patient and

exacting, Sr. Teresa Ann held her young Sisters to a high standard.

Sr. Marianne appreciates that more today than ever.

“She used to say, It doesn’t matter what anyone else is doing,” Sr. Marianne says. “You have to decide what kind of a Sister you want to be. What values do you hold?”

“I think of her often. Her advice – and the advice of other elders – has continued to help me live my life.”

Trust your inner voice

Be still and know. - Psalm 46

Whether actively looking for guidance or not, it’s often right in front of us, on our bookshelves, in our music, in those we greet every day. In our hearts.

“Sometimes we watch or read or hear something that hits us just right,” Sister Susan Hutchens, OSB muses. “It’s the right time.”

And when you’ve listened as deeply and as long as you can?

“Trust your instincts, your inner voice, the quiet whisper within,” Sr. Catherine says.

“Weigh the pros and cons, say a prayer and make the decision. Trust your inner voice. It has been listening to the Spirit since you were born.”





How to *listen* to advice ...

By Sister Mary Core, OSB

Several years ago I was struggling with the death of a beloved older sister, a period of barrenness in my prayer life, and a desire to slow down and truly encounter my God.

While babbling to God about all my issues, I remember raising my fist and saying, "I need help here, Lord! Where are you?"

In retrospect, it was a moment of extraordinary grace for me, for in that moment I truly wanted God's answer and it was given.

God spoke in the words of Psalm 46:11, "Be still and know that I am God." While these were the words I heard, the message was more like, "Shut-up and Listen for a change!"

In that moment I felt a wonderful thing happen. I was transported in my mind (yet

the experience was very close and real) to a park bench where I found myself seated beside Jesus. He looked at me (though I can't remember seeing his face), put his arm around me, drew me close and said, "Just rest, rest in me."

And I did.

Since that time the image of a park bench has been a very rich and comforting symbol for me.

The pearl of truth

Listening to advice from anyone - even God! - can be difficult. It may mean changing something we don't want to change. We may feel hurt because we think our idea or opinion isn't valued. We may not value the opinion of the one giving us advice.

Whatever the situation when advice is being given, listening for the pearl of truth is the

important thing. We need to quiet down, focus, and be open.

In other words, we need to sit on the park bench.

When we take the time to do that - to really listen and hear the words of another - we gain perspective. Later, in prayer, we can let its pearl of truth take root in us and change us for the better. We can also allow what isn't true, honest, valuable, or caring to be washed away.

Quietly sitting with Jesus and trusting that he will guide us and keep us safe, isn't always easy or comfortable. In fact, it can be a truly painful, gut-wrenching experience. But in the end, its results are much better than running around wearing yourself out with only the sound of your own voice. May you find your own special park bench.

Sister Margaret Murphy, OSB, right, says her primary role as spiritual director is one of listener. Call Sr. Margaret at (309) 283-2100 to learn more about spiritual direction or to make an appointment.



... and how to give it

(Hint: Don't say much!)

Advice is one person's wisdom, proffered both to those who haven't asked for it and don't want it, and to those who have and do. But while Scripture suggests we listen to advice, it doesn't insist we follow it – or give it in the first place.

Sister Susan Hutchens, OSB says when we're asked for advice, often the best response is to simply listen.

"Usually people ask for advice when they're weighing options," she says. "They've made their list of pros and cons. Sometimes they want to hear advice about it but sometimes they don't."

Either way, she says we should encourage them to talk without interruption.

"Listening offers us a chance to understand their question or problem more deeply," she

says. "It allows us to say, Have you thought of this? Rather than, I think you should do that."

It also offers a chance for interlocutors to listen more deeply to themselves, and perhaps come to their own conclusion.

Further, advice – whether asked for or not – must be given with care.

"Advice should be thoughtful and in accord with the person asking for help and with the situation at hand," Sister Catherine Cleary, OSB says.

"The advice must be grounded in Christ's command to Love one another as I have loved you."



Monastery Notes

Missions Set for Year

We held our annual missioning ritual during Vespers on Sunday, Aug. 7, in our chapel. The ritual is one in which our Sisters receive special direction from the prioress for the coming year. We've done it since our founding in 1874.

Before the Second Vatican Council, Sisters would be assigned to missions, mostly as teachers, across the state of Illinois. Where they went and what they did was not within their control.

"I remember sitting in chapel on Missioning Day, waiting to hear my name," Sr. Catherine Maloney, OSB, says.

"None of us knew where we would be sent. The mission names were read alphabetically, so if you were going to be sent to Atkinson, you'd find out right

away and be able to relax for the rest of the ceremony. If you were being sent to Wenona, you had to wait a long time. We were on pins and needles!"

Today, Sisters participate in their ministry choices, so the where and why are unlikely to come as a surprise. But the blessing of being asked to do something very particular for the community and God's creation is still poignant.

Everyone is asked to do something. Even our eldest members participate in prayer ministry!

Shown above are Sisters Sandra Brunenn and Janet Cassidy during the 2016 Missioning ceremony.

Benedictine News

Summer began with our annual silent retreat directed by Father Joel Rippinger, OSB. It was a graced time that we share with you on our Monastery Wisdom blog – along with many other stories and resources – at smmsisters.org.

As we look forward now to crisp days and cool nights, here's a rundown of some of our recent activities:

Sisters Sandra Brunenn and Sheila McGrath attended LCWR's annual assembly in Atlanta, Georgia. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious represents nearly 80 percent of the approximately 49,000 Catholic Sisters in the United States.

Founded in 1956, LCWR assists its members to collaboratively carry out their service of leadership to further the mission of the Gospel in today's world.

Sister Susan Hutchens accepted the position of formation director for the community. She will guide new members in their study of Benedictine monasticism.

Sisters Ruth Ksycki, Susan Hutchens and Stefanie MacDonald attended the Monastic Institute at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn.

Sisters Marianne Burkhard, Marlene Miller and Jackie Walsh attended the American Benedictine Academy Conference at Our Lady of Peace Monastery in Beech Grove, Ind.

Sister Roberta Bussan was recognized by the City of Rock Island, on behalf of the community, for our partnership with the Summer Enrichment Initiative. Designed to help at-risk youth maintain academic standing over the summer, the monastery hosted the students on our grounds several mornings over the summer. We helped teach the children about the natural world with our lake, woods and prairie.

Sister Marianne Burkhard was re-elected to the Board of the American Benedictine Academy.

Sister Irene Krogmeier celebrated her 70th jubilee, and Sisters Margaret Murphy and Mary Schmidt celebrated their 60th jubilees.



Sister Mary Jane Wallace poses for a photo with one of her star piano students following their annual recital. It took place in the monastery chapel.



Benedictine Sisters shared our grounds with students from the Summer Enrichment Initiative. On hand to greet and help the children were several Sisters, including Sister Roberta Bussan (shown), and Oblates.



SMA News

Members of the SMA Class of 1956 gathered for a daylong reunion on Friday, June 3, 2016.

They invited members of other classes and those alums in the area. There was a great day of visiting, attending the Eucharist with the Sisters and then enjoying lunch together in the sisters' dining room.

Shown, front row, left to right (seated): Kay Wiedinger Berres '56, Susie Martens Floming-Deskin '55, Helen Rees McCoy '56. Middle row, l-r: Mary Ellen Windy Cauwels '56, Veronica Hecks Minnaert '62, Rosanne Barnes Myers '57, Mary Cox Schulz '57. Back row, l-r: Norma Hecks Stann '56, Nancy Hannon DeBord '56, Carolyn VandeKeere Oldfield '56, Sister Marilyn Roman '55, Patricia Winters DeReu '55.





Members of the Class of '96 met at Benet House Retreat Center to celebrate the 20th anniversary of their graduation July 22-24. Pictured in downtown Rock Island, left to right: Paula Koshiol Kraus (Religion Teacher), Kate Friederich Snyder, Laura Starkweather Lawrence, Rochelle La Crosse, Stephanie Johnson Sobel, Bobbi Beavers Helmers (RA), Amy Schmitt, Katie Gibson-Arsenault, and Alison Siegfried Purteil. Not pictured: Erin Keenan Pirnat.

Kay Wiedinger Berres, '56 and husband Paul celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary June 1, 2016.

Sally Hanrahan Hedgepeth, '55 and husband William celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary August 11, 2016.

In Memoriam...

Jeffrey Reidner, husband of **Gabrielle D'Amore Reidner, '78**, died on July 22, 2016.

Jessica Kenny Facer, '96 died on July 5, 2016.

Gerald Dunn, husband of **Anita Becker Dunn, '56**, died July 31, 2016.

Reunion Announcements

In Rock Island:

Class of 1976
Sept.9-11, 2016

Class of 1962
(72nd Birthdays)
Sept.30-Oct. 2, 2016

Class of 1981
Nov. 4-6, 2016

At Starved Rock:

Class of 1965
Annual Luncheon

Members will meet at the Lodge dining room at 11:30 a.m. on Oct. 4, 2016. at Starved Rock State Park, Utica, IL Call Paulette Fisher for information: 563-505-4573



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