

Volunteers Return to the Monastery



Connecting
Point



Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

Letting Go With Hope

Why is it the seasons seem to come and go more quickly as we age? We see the thawing of winter and excitedly await the joys of Spring and Easter, and the next thing we know, gardens begin to grow. The flower beds are filled with beauty and color and brighten our Chapel all summer. The vegetable gardens this year provided a harvest of delicious food to grace our tables and nourish our bodies.

Then, all of a sudden, we see the first orange or red leaf on the maple trees, and Fall is upon us.

For the gift of each season of nature we rejoice at its arrival and experience a twinge of sadness when it leaves us. But God is in them all, alive and well, calling us always forward into the future – with all of its unknowns, and also with its hope.

Since early Spring we have experienced five deaths here at the monastery: four of our Sisters, and one of a Sister's mother who lived here with us. Each one calls us to let go, to express sorrow and good-byes, as we do with the seasons, and to rejoice in the knowledge that God has come in all fullness for each of them. After all – that is what we, as Christians, live for – the ultimate coming of Christ to take us “home.”

*Upon our heads and upon our hearts
the blessing of God.*

*In our coming and going
the peace of God.*

*In our life and believing
the love of God.*

*And in our death and new beginning
the arms of God to welcome us and bring us home.*

- Blessing Prayer of Iona

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We thank you each day for your prayers for us and we daily hold you in ours.

Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

A Volunteer Update

By Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB,
Volunteer Coordinator

Since being established in 1874, St. Mary Monastery volunteers have played a significant role in our ministries, both in Nauvoo, Illinois, and in the Quad Cities. Due to the pandemic in March, 2020, we made the difficult decision to close the monastery doors. As a community, we struggled with not being able to welcome guests into the monastery.

After a two-year separation, we were thrilled to welcome back our volunteers this summer. We enjoyed being in their presence, knowing they enhance and expand our mission to receive all as Christ.

A key role all our volunteers reflect is the Benedictine value of hospitality. In the Bible, hospitality is seen both as a work of mercy and a witness to faith. We remember Abraham leaving the shade of his tent in the noonday heat to welcome three strangers who turned out to be messengers from God.

Our doors are now open, and you will see familiar faces at the Welcome Desk as you enter the monastery. We also have volunteers visiting with our Sisters in Health Care, working in our raised garden beds, organizing books in the monastery library, and assisting with Benet House retreat needs.

To assist our volunteer community, we recently completed a new Volunteer Handbook with information on our history, mission and values, in addition to an explanation of our Benedictine Medal and our Logo.

In this issue of Connecting Point, you'll enjoy learning more from our volunteers. The St. Mary Monastery community envisions that our facilities and grounds be used as a place where volunteers and guests share in our community of prayer, peace and spiritual energy.

Come serve with us as we embrace the future together!



Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB, in the Sisters Dining Room

If you would like to learn more about volunteer opportunities at St. Mary Monastery, contact Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB, Volunteer Coordinator, at mmiller@smmsisters.org or (309) 283-2102.

Cover page photo: Volunteers Paulette Fisher, Melanie Maez, Mary Sue Adams and Joanna Greenwood





Volunteer Rosemary Schmitt at the St. Mary Monastery Welcome Desk

Volunteers Return!

Do you remember being greeted as you entered the foyer at St. Mary Monastery? Then you likely met one of our faithful volunteers who practice hospitality.

Closing the monastery doors due to the pandemic was a difficult decision. Sr. Marlene Miller explained, “Hospitality is one of our core Benedictine values, so not being able to welcome our volunteers, Oblates, friends, family and guests into the monastery was painful for our community.”

Beginning in March 2020, volunteer activities such as reading to the Sisters in Health Care or taking them outdoors for a visit were no longer possible. Benet House hospitality greeters were not needed since the retreat center was also closed.

Many volunteer tasks were now done by Sisters, while some activities successfully transitioned to remote work.

Volunteer Experiences

After many years attending Benet House retreats, **Barb Senatra** shares her technology expertise to maintain and improve the monastery database. “I missed my weekly visits to the monastery, but was

able to continue helping the community by updating the database remotely from home,” Barb shared.

Pat Dickerson served with Sr. Cecile Baer on the board for Special People Encounter Christ (SPEC). With gentle nudges from Sr. Cecile, she began serving at the Welcome Desk. Pat enjoys connecting with the Sisters and shared, “I enjoy listening to the organ music being played in the Chapel, and feel such a sense of peace when I serve.”

Rosemary Schmitt became well acquainted with the Benedictines as a member of a Centering Prayer group led by Sr. Audrey Cleary. In 2001, when she learned the St. Mary Monastery community was moving to Rock Island, Rosemary offered to help with the moving process.

“I remember it was a beautiful November day, and I felt excited to be a part of this new beginning for the Sisters,” shared Rosemary. At that time, Sr. Mary Jane Wallace directed the volunteer program and asked Rosemary to consider volunteering at the Welcome Desk, which Rosemary has been doing for more than twenty years.

Updated Volunteer Handbook

In 2015 a strategic planning process led to the formation of a mission implementation team. Two volunteers, Debbie Schwiebert and Sheryl Neumann worked with Sr. Bobbi Bussan on an update to the monastery's Volunteer Handbook.

Debbie used her marketing experiences to help organize the Volunteer Handbook which includes a history of the Sisters of St. Benedict, the community mission and values, volunteer roles and other resources.



Volunteers Debbie Schwiebert and Sheryl Neumann

“It is such an uplifting experience to serve with the Sisters. I so admire their spirituality, their service orientation and the loving ways they live their lives.”

DEBBIE SCHWIEBERT

The Sisters are grateful for the many volunteers who are part of our ministry, and welcome others to consider joining our volunteer team.

If you would like to learn more about volunteer opportunities at St. Mary Monastery, contact Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB, Volunteer Coordinator, at mmiller@smmsisters.org or (309) 283-2102.

Live-in Volunteer Program

St. Mary Monastery began a volunteer program in 2014 that allows individuals to spend time in monastic community with the intent to deepen their relationship with God through prayer and work.

Oblate Lori Carroll was accepted into the program, and when she is living on the 5th floor of the monastery, Lori's volunteer service includes playing the organ for prayer services and Mass, helping Sisters in their gardens and assisting in the monastery library. Lori reflects, “St. Mary Monastery is an oasis in a troubled world. Being a live-in volunteer can be a gift to our beloved Sisters, and to yourself.”

Since moving to Rock Island in 2001, volunteers have played a vital role in the mission of St. Mary Monastery.



The Memorare

*Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary,
that never was it known
that anyone who fled to your protection,
implored your help,
or sought your intercession,
was left unaided.*

*Inspired by this confidence
I fly unto you,*

O Virgin of virgins, my Mother.

*To you do I come,
before you I stand,
sinful and sorrowful.*

*O Mother of the Word Incarnate,
despise not my petitions,
but in your mercy hear and answer me.*

Amen.

The Sisters of St. Mary Monastery began saying this prayer during the pandemic each day before the evening meal, and continue that practice today.

Hospitality

By **Spencer Gillespie**
Oblate of **St. Mary Monastery**



Spencer and Barbara Gillespie

The practice of hospitality, so central to Benedictine spirituality, is a natural expression of offering oneself in service and love to Christ. St. Benedict places great emphasis on the welcoming of guests and pilgrims into the care of the community. All are to be welcomed as Christ (RB 53:1) insists Benedict, and to be received with all courtesy and humility (RB 53:3,6). Each one is to receive every kindness (RB 53:9), but especially those who may be poor or on pilgrimage, because “in them more particularly Christ is received” (RB 53:15). Hospitality is a spiritual act. In welcoming another, we mirror the divine compassion embodied by Jesus, who welcomed all who sought him for succor and sustenance.

In practicing hospitality, we attempt to make ourselves, our homes, our churches and communities welcoming centers of acceptance, respite and care. We feed the hungry and shelter the homeless, offer rest to the weary, acceptance to the marginal, and hope to the discouraged. We try to channel the compassion of Christ with all whose lives intersect ours, be they co-workers or clients, the person standing next to us in line or sitting beside us in the waiting room, the panhandler who approaches us on the street corner, or one who may live under our own roof. Acts of hospitality may be as simple as offering an inviting smile, a listening ear, a kind word, or as Jesus suggests, a cup of cool water in his name.

Living hospitably means meeting others with openness rather than skepticism, receiving them with kindness rather than rudeness, serving them freely rather than reluctantly, sharing with them generously rather than calculatingly, and doing so with no expectation of reciprocation, personal benefit, or even gratitude. We do it simply because of who God is and God’s generosity toward us. Of course, such living requires a whole new way of seeing and responding.

We learn to listen to others with the “ears of our hearts” and to see them with the “eyes of our hearts,” looking beneath physical appearance, looking past

distinctions of race, class, gender, education or religion, looking beyond cultural prejudices and stereotypes, to see the living Christ who meets us in each one.

In short, we learn to prefer nothing whatever – not even our own comfort, security, habits, reputation, or tradition – to Christ (RB 72:11).





Still Bearing Fruit

On the feast of St. Benedict, the Scripture passage of Jeremiah 17:7-8 is read at Noon Day Prayer. As the Sisters of St. Mary Monastery emerge from seclusion due to the global pandemic, the last line rings especially true:

*“Blessed are they who trust in the Lord,
whose hope is the Lord.
They are like a tree planted beside the water,
that stretches out its roots to the stream.
It fears not the heat when it comes,
its leaves stay green.
In the year of drought it shows no distress,
But still bears fruit.”*

When the grim reality of the pandemic became clear, Prioress Sr. Sandra Brunenn made the difficult decision to close the monastery doors, including Benet House.

Safety protocols were established which included a quarantine area on the 5th floor for any Sisters diagnosed with Covid. Due to her role teaching in a Catholic school, Sr. Stefanie MacDonald moved her living arrangements from the monastery to Benet House. She also managed the online shopping and delivery of supplies to the

monastery. “I missed many things about my community as we lived apart, but I especially missed our communal prayers each day,” Sr. Stefanie shared.

Ora et Labora

As time behind closed doors stretched from months to more than two years, the community continued ‘ora et labora’ - to pray and work.

The election of Prioress scheduled for April 2020 was delayed when the Federation President was diagnosed with Covid and unable to travel. Sr. Sandra Brunenn remained in her role as Prioress until Sr. Susan Hutchens was elected in June 2020. Due to these unusual circumstances, Sr. Susan immediately stepped into leading the community balancing both Benedictine life and Covid regulations.

For over two months, even Priests were not allowed inside the monastery to celebrate Eucharist. With the exception of Easter, the Sisters did not have Mass for ten Sundays.

Activities such as serving the evening meal at the Rock Island Township ceased. Sisters packed sack lunches as a substitute so people could receive a meal.

The New Normal

During seclusion, the community enjoyed frequent game nights, documentaries, movies and online symphony concerts.

Zoom technology was embraced for Oblate meetings, Benet House virtual retreats and monastery meetings. Sr. Mary Jane Wallace used Zoom to teach her final piano lessons.

Over a 20-month period, the community experienced deep losses, with the deaths of eight community members: Sisters Cecile Baer, Rita Cain, Mary Core, Catherine Maloney, Rosemary Murphy, Anne Newcomer, Denise Vrombaut and Mary Jane Wallace. Gratefully, none of these Sisters died of Covid. Funerals were broadcast via Facebook livestream, but family members were not able to attend most of the funeral services until this Spring.

Bearing Fruit

In the face of loss and solitude, the community continued moving forward. Consistent with their commitment to Care of Creation, the solar module installation began in May and was completed in September 2021.

A new monastery phone system was installed, along with an updated digital audio/visual system at Benet House. The infrastructure of Benet House was also upgraded with new furnaces and air conditioning units.

In the Spring of 2022, raised garden beds provided more accessible gardening for the Sisters to



Sisters packing sack lunches for the Rock Island Township weekly meal

enjoy a harvest of fresh produce. Ordering flowers brought excitement as the community planted new life in the soil of St. Mary Monastery.

Resilience

Reflecting on the pandemic experience, Sr. Ruth Ksycki shared:

'I was surprised how a tiny virus could bring the world to its knees. We were no longer in control. During the rollercoaster ride of the pandemic, I learned to lessen my desire for control and appreciate the values of patience and perseverance. Laughter helped me relieve tension and arise with a smile at sunrise while cherishing another day in the beauty of God's creation. I also learned the language of Zoom, chat rooms, virtual, hybrid, host, mute, unmute and more.'

With a renewed sense of resilience, the monastery opened its doors again in June 2022.



**Sr. Mary Magdalene
(Maggie) Buerghler, OSB**

Sr. Mary Magdalene (Maggie) Buerghler, OSB, 1936 - 2022

Sr. Mary Magdalene “Maggie” Buerghler, OSB, died Saturday, August 6, 2022 at the monastery. Born in Fort Smith, AR, she was the daughter of Martin and Frances (Leding) Buerghler. She entered the Benedictine Community at St. Scholastica Monastery, Fort Smith, AR, in 1952 and made her profession as a Benedictine Sister on June 24, 1955.

Sr. Maggie was a founding member of Our Lady of Peace Monastery, Columbia, MO, established by Fort Smith, AR in 1969. Upon its closure, she transferred to St. Mary Monastery in 2010. Sr. Maggie received her bachelor’s degree from Incarnate Word College, San Antonio, TX; a master’s degree in Special Education from Cardinal Stritch College, Milwaukee, WI; and a master’s degree in Pastoral Ministry from Seattle University.

Her ministry included elementary grade teaching in Arkansas, Missouri and Maryland, and pastoral ministry in parishes in Columbia, MO. Sr. Maggie is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; her brother, Bede and sister-in-law Maryann, sister-in-law Betty (Ben) Buerghler; and nieces, nephews and cousins. She was preceded in death by her parents; and brothers Father Luke, OSB, Abbot Boniface, OSB and Ben Buerghler.



**Sr. Charlotte
Sonneville, OSB**

Sr. Charlotte Sonnevile, OSB, 1929 - 2022

Sr. Charlotte Sonnevile, OSB, died Monday, August 22, 2022 at UnityPoint Health-Trinity, Rock Island, IL. Born in Moline, IL, she was the daughter of Charles Louis and Marguerite (Cauwels) Sonnevile. She entered the Benedictine Community on November 1, 1947 and made her profession as a Benedictine Sister on July 11, 1949. She celebrated her 70th Jubilee in 2019.

She graduated from St. Mary’s Academy in Nauvoo, IL, received her bachelor’s degree in Music from the University of Illinois, and did further studies at Loras College in Dubuque, IA. Sr. Charlotte received a master’s degree in Religious Education from Loyola University, Chicago.

Sr. Charlotte’s ministry included teaching music in Munster, IN and in Peoria, Moline, Ladd, Peru, and St. Mary’s Academy, Nauvoo, IL; Director of the Benedictine Religious Education Center in Peru, IL and at St. Patrick’s Parish, LaSalle, IL. She founded the Illinois Valley Food Pantry in La Salle, IL, and ministered at St. Joseph’s Parish Pekin, IL and at St. Ambrose Parish, Milan, IL. She served as Liturgy Director and as Director of Benet House Retreat Center at St. Mary Monastery.

Sr. Charlotte is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; nieces, nephews, and cousins. She was preceded in death by her parents; and brothers, Arthur, Joseph, and Charles, Jr.

In Memoriam . . .

Alumnæ

Gerri Hinz Murphy '74 died September 3, 2021.

Alison Doherty '84, died September 2, 2022.

Friends

Roger Zerwer died December 18, 2021, brother of **Mary Jo Zerwer '61** and nephew of SMM Sr. Kathleen Neville.

Deb Jacquet died July 11, 2022. Deb worked in the monastery Food Service Area from 2001 – 2011.

Clare Johnigk Waibel, died July 25, 2022, known while in the community as Sr. Mary Clare.

Carol Bussan died September 5, 2022, mother of **Sr. Bobbi Bussan**.

Steven Jones died September 5, 2022, brother of **Oblate Linda Clewell**.



SMA Class of '65 gathers in Galesburg



Clockwise from lower left: Dianne Wood Adkisson, Carol Cruse Maloney, Linda Sullivan Owens, Joy Schierer, Patty Haas Henson, Paulette Hansen Fisher, Shirley Pecharich McElvain, Andy Abrams Corbett, Jane Amann Wolgemuth



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Jan Gull, Editor

2022 Oblate Day:

*Benedictine Hospitality Incarnated
in Everyday Life
Reflections by Six Oblates*

Saturday, October 22

9:15 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. (Lunch included)

Cost: \$30

To register: Call Sr. Ruth Ksycki, OSB or email
rksycki@smmsisters.org



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