

# A Time to Ring the Bells!



**Connecting  
Point**



**Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB**  
*Prioress*

## WE are because YOU are!

“**UBUNTU**” is an African Bantu word meaning “**humanity.**” It is sometimes translated as “I am because we are” or “we are because I am.” It is how we grow as humans, living with and for others. It refers to the idea that we each are who we are because of all those whom we have touched, and whose lives have touched ours – our shared humanity.

On this October 15 we will begin the celebration of our 150th Anniversary year as the community of Sisters of St. Benedict of St. Mary Monastery. All those with whom we share “**UBUNTU**” cannot be counted! They began with our arrival in Nauvoo in Oct. 1874 and the first seven students who enrolled in St. Mary’s school for young women in Nauvoo, IL. They continued over the 123 years that St. Mary’s Academy existed until 1997. They have extended over these many years to the thousands of young people taught in the 30+ elementary, high schools and multiple colleges where our Sisters served, to the 20+ parishes where the children were taught their religious education in catechetical programs in summers and during the school years, to other parish settings where sisters led faith formation programs for adults, and trained them to do the same when the Sisters moved on. Our Sisters’ lives touched others in need of Social assistance through counseling, or in work with the poor, the homeless, and prisoners. They served in Diocesan offices, as administrators, and more recently in sharing our faith in Christ and our Benedictine values through Benet House Retreat Center and our Oblate program.

We are today who we are as community because of all of YOU! You are because of us. That is “**UBUNTU**”. We are all a gift from God to one another. We are grateful! We have shared your lives in times of joy, and in sorrow. We attended your graduations, weddings, the baptisms of your children and even family funerals. And you have accompanied us on our journeys.

The bells on the cover tell our history from the single bell that rang in the school and priory tower in Nauvoo in 1892 to the 3 “new bells” given to us in 1962 that hung in the modern bell tower in Nauvoo, and now in Rock Island. We honor them as we ring them during this year of celebration.

Those bells rang out many times in joy and in sorrow over these 149 years and they will continue to ring throughout the coming year and beyond. We ask that you be with us this year in person or in spirit, as together we celebrate this 150th year of life in community with all of you. WE are because YOU are!

With Love and Gratitude,  
Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB  
and the Sisters of St. Benedict

## As We Begin Our 150th Year...

As the Sisters of St. Mary Monastery mark the beginning of their 150 years in community and service to God and others, Sr. Sheila McGrath, OSB, reflects on her years in community and ministry.

### What have your ministries been?

I taught Illinois grade school in Nauvoo, Chicago, Clinton and Ivesdale. At the high school level, I taught at St. Mary's Academy in Nauvoo and Bergan High School in Peoria.

I served as Formation and Vocation Director from 1975-1984, and ministered as Hospital and Hospice Chaplain in Quad Cities hospitals for 12 years. For 20 years, I served as Subprioress with Prioresses Catherine Cleary, Ruth Ksycki and Sandra Brunenn. Currently I volunteer in the surgery waiting room at UnityPoint Health – Trinity Rock Island.

### How has the community changed during your years since entrance?

When I entered in 1953, we wore habits, lived a very structured life, and we had a much larger community. In 1962, Vatican II brought changes to the Catholic Church and to St. Mary Monastery. Our teaching ministries changed from teaching primarily in small town Catholic schools to branching out into parish ministries, Newman centers at colleges and universities, hospital chaplaincy ministry and social justice work.

We have faced many crossroads that brought changes, particularly the community decision to close St. Mary's Academy in 1997, and move to Rock Island in 2001.



*Sr. Sheila McGrath, OSB*

### What has not changed?

Our commitment to prayer has not changed. We pray Morning, Noonday and Evening prayers as well as Compline on Sundays. We celebrate Mass together on Sundays, and other significant Feast Days, such as our Founders Day. Our Benedictine charism of prayer, stewardship, community life and listening with the ear of our hearts has not changed.

### What do you look forward to?

Our days are a gift from God. I want and hope to live fully each day that I am on earth.

### What are you grateful for?

I am thankful for the numerous gifts and blessings we as a community have received over these many years. I am also grateful for each Sister in this community. They are mentors and friends who help me to “Listen with the ear of my heart” to God’s message to me, “to seek peace” and “to prefer nothing whatever to Christ.” (Rule of Benedict)



*St. Scholastica Academy and Convent, 1874*

## A Journey of Faith

**By Sr. Bobbi Bussan, OSB, and Debbie Schwiebert**

Life is a journey and we know not if it will unfold according to our plans and dreams. We hope for a meaningful outcome but there are always surprises along the way and new directions taken.

Imagine it is 1874. Four sisters and one postulant are setting out from St. Scholastica's Convent in Chicago, Illinois, for Nauvoo, Illinois, to establish a school for girls. Excitement, apprehension, concern and a little fear of the unknown may have been some of the emotions they experienced. Their Pastor had given them this mission and they believed God, and our Blessed Mother, would guide and inspire them and direct their paths.

The first convent and school were established in a residence which had been built as the Mormon arsenal. The local parish had purchased this home for the Sisters to use as a school and living quarters. St. Scholastica Academy (later St. Mary's Academy) opened on All Souls Day in 1874, with seven girls enrolled. Their schooling was paid for with food, fuel and even a cow in one instance.

St. Mary's Academy thrived throughout the latter part of the 19th Century and most of the 20th Century. After 123 years, with the popularity of boarding schools declining, the Sisters made the difficult decision in 1997 to close the Academy. Today the spirit of the Academy lives on through the families of thousands of alumnae who benefited from the teaching, lives and love of the Sisters.

In addition to the Academy, Sisters have served in parishes, elementary and high schools, social agencies, hospitals and communities throughout the states of Illinois and Indiana. The Sisters have also ministered in Colleges, Universities and Diocesan Chancery Offices. Special ministries in Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Mexico and New Mexico were begun following Vatican II.

In 2001 another leap of faith was made when the Sisters moved from Nauvoo to Rock Island and built a new complex comprised of St. Mary Monastery and Benet House Retreat Center. Respect for the environment was a driving force behind the innovative design of the complex: acres of woods for wild life were preserved, native prairie grasses were

planted and the creation of a five acre lake allowed geothermal heating and cooling. More recently an array of solar panels was added to provide sustainable electrical power.

The Sisters follow the Rule of St. Benedict in their everyday life, particularly valuing Community, Prayer, Hospitality, Peace and Justice and Care of Creation. At the Rock Island monastery, the Sisters engage in prayer, retreats, education and outreach to the poor. Benedictine Oblates, lay women and men who feel called to live the Rule of St. Benedict according to their ability and lifestyle, participate with the Sisters in living the Benedictine values. Many volunteers work with the Sisters and provide assistance for their ministries and daily tasks at the monastery.

150 years ago four Sisters and one postulant could not have known how many countless lives would be touched, changed and enriched through their response to God's call.

The 150th Anniversary of the Founding of the Sisters of St. Benedict will begin in October 2023 and continue through October 2024. Celebrations, activities and special liturgies will be offered for families and friends of the Sisters, alumnae of St. Mary's Academy, and for area clergy and special guests. Follow along with us during the year, as we celebrate and honor the joy and memories of these 150 years.

To learn more about the 150th Anniversary celebrations in honor of the Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Mary Monastery, and the gift of these years, please visit [www.smmsisters.org/150](http://www.smmsisters.org/150).



*Sr. Cabrini Rael, Circa 1974*



*St. Mary Monastery and Benet House Retreat Center*



*St. Mary Monastery, watercolor by Mark Schwiebert*



*Bell Tower, St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island, IL*

## Ring Those Bells!

As the Benedictine Sisters begin their 150th year of ministry, the bells of St. Mary Monastery in Rock Island ring with a call to prayer.

“The sound of the bells is a sacred reminder to immediately set aside our work, to gather as a community, and to pray,” shared Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB.

In addition to prayer, the bells also ring when a Sister dies and when her body is carried out for burial following the funeral liturgy. Each day the bells ring up to four times plus at Noon and 6:00 p.m. for the Angelus. The Angelus is a prayer of devotion to Mary and to Jesus that can be prayed alone or in groups.

### History

When the Nauvoo community was established in 1874, a small bell was manually rung for prayers. In 1892, a bell was hung in the cupola of the Academy building, and it remained in use until the building was demolished in the 1960s. This bell is now located outside the Sisters Dining Room in Rock Island.

In 1962, Mary Tholen donated three bronze bells to St. Mary Priory in Nauvoo, in honor of her brother, Monsignor L.C. (Leonard) Tholen, who had served as pastor of Sts. Peter & Paul in Nauvoo for 31 years.

These bells were cast in Holland by the Petit-Fritsen, Aarle-Rixtel Co. and electric bell ringing equipment was added by the L.D. Verdin Co. in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Each bell has a distinctive tone, name, and inscription. The bells have a combined weight of 3/4 ton. They were rung for the first time when President Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963.

The top bell is named Leonard-Mary in honor of the donors. The bell has a pitch tone of F, and its inscription reads “Praise be to Thee, O Lord, King of the Eternal Glory.”

The middle bell named St. Mary, has a pitch tone of D, and is inscribed “My soul magnifies the Lord.”

The bottom bell has an A sharp pitch tone and is named St. Benedict. Its inscription reads “Benediction and Glory to our God forever and ever.”

## Bell Tower

The Nauvoo bell tower was a gift from the St. Mary's Academy Alumnae to the Benedictine Sisters. The 50-ft. stainless steel arched bell tower was an original design by Edo Belli. The bell tower, set in 5 ft. of concrete, weighed 6,880 pounds and was manufactured in St. Louis by the Nooter Steel Fabricating Company.

When the community decided to close the Academy and relocate to Rock Island, IL, the Nauvoo bell tower could not be moved. The bells were removed and transported to the Verdin Co. in Cincinnati, OH to receive new mechanical equipment and new strikers. It was May, 2002 before they could be placed permanently in the new bell tower designed by John VanDyke, architect of the Rock Island monastery, and again rang out the joy of prayer and life for the Sisters. It was a day of celebration!



### THE BELLS OF ST. MARY'S

**“The Bells of St. Mary’s,  
I hear they are calling  
The old girls, the new girls  
who pledge loyalty  
And so my dear comrades,  
when school days are over  
These dear old bells  
will still ring out for  
you and me.”**

SMA School Song

Prioress Susan Hutchens shared, “The Rule of Benedict describes a day centered around times of prayer and meals, rest and work. The rhythm of the day is repetitive and focuses on Christ who fills our lives. It is the bells which over hundreds of years have rung out to acknowledge those times in the lives of all Benedictines, wherever their home may be. May those bells continue to sound the joy of our lives.”



*Bell Tower, St. Mary Priory, Nauvoo, IL*



*Bell hung in the St. Mary's Academy Building.  
Bell is inscribed Mary Agnes Vincent Joseph, Dec 8, 1892.*



*St. Mary Priory (left) and St. Mary's Academy (right), Nauvoo, IL*

*Save the Date*  
**July 12-14, 2024**

*St. Mary's Academy Reunion*  
*Celebrating the 150th Anniversary of Our Founding*

*Since St. Scholastica's Academy (later St. Mary's Academy) opened on All Souls Day in 1874, several thousand alumnae and their families benefited from the teaching of the Benedictine Sisters and camaraderie with fellow classmates.*

*Next summer the Sisters of St. Benedict will host a St. Mary's Academy Class Reunion, and all graduates and former attendees of St. Mary's Academy are invited to attend. Come gather with friends and the St. Mary Monastery community on Friday, July 12th through Sunday, July 14th.*

*Enjoy the beauty of St. Mary Monastery and grounds while connecting with alumnae from St. Mary's Academy. On Sunday, July 14th there will be a Eucharistic Liturgy followed by a special meal together.*

*You don't want to miss this special event!*

*Formal Invitation to Follow*



# Benedictine Briefs

## Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR) Assembly

Prioress Susan Hutchens along with about 800 other religious women leaders attended the 2023 LCWR assembly in Dallas, TX, August 8-11. Entitled “Drawn by Sacred Mystery,” the gathering highlighted their lives as a continuing Journey of Hope. All presentations were given with a contemplative spirit. The keynote address given by Brian Swimme focused on our deep connection of communion with the universe. The women were encouraged to not only “enlarge their tents” as Pope Francis has encouraged, but to step outside of the tent, see the stars, and imagine what might yet be in store for religious life going forward.

## Feast of St. Benedict

The Sisters celebrated the Feast of St. Benedict with a vigil on July 11th. On the feast day, they gathered for Mass followed by coffee and donuts and a festive dinner after Vespers.

## Friendship and Fellowship

Sisters Sandra Brunenn, Janet Cassidy, Sheila McGrath and Marlene Miller attended a conference at Chautauqua Institution in Chautauqua, New York. Founded in 1878, this educational and summer resort for adults promotes self-learning. The theme for the week was “Exploring Friendship: The Importance of Friendship and Fellowship”. The June conference offered lectures dedicated to exploring the best in human values and enrichment of life, prayer opportunities and camaraderie with other attendees as well as evening cultural experiences.

## International Oblate Congress

The Fifth International Benedictine Oblate Congress met in Sant’Anselmo, Italy, September 9-15. The theme of the conference was “Moving Forward: Living the Wisdom of the Rule”. Oblate Lori Carroll attended the conference to represent the Oblates of St. Mary Monastery.

## Benedictine 55 and Under Gathering

Sr. Stefanie MacDonald attended the Benedictine “55 and Under” Gathering at Immaculata Monastery in Norfolk, Nebraska. The theme of the conference was “Embracing our Future with Joy and Collaboration.” The Sisters participated in a service project while there and also shared ideas for working together within the U.S. Benedictine congregations.



*Sr. Stefanie MacDonald, OSB, and the Benedictine 55 and Under Gathering, 2023*

## Association of Benedictine Retreat Centers (ABRC)

Sr. Bobbi Bussan and Lorene Knobbe, Benet House Assistant Program Director, attended the Association of Benedictine Retreat Center annual conference at Conception Abbey Retreat and Conference Center in Conception, MO. The August conference was entitled “Embracing the Rule as a Framework for Ministry.” Sr. Bobbi recently completed her eight-year term as Co-Chair of the ABRC.



*Sr. Bobbi Bussan, OSB, Benet House Director, and Lorene Knobbe attended the Association of Benedictine Retreat Centers annual conference, 2023.*



**Sr. Helen Carey, OSB**  
1931-2023

## **Sr. Helen Carey, OSB**

**1931-2023**

Sr. Helen (Mary Ann) Carey, OSB, died Wednesday, June 21, 2023 at the Monastery. Born in Chicago, IL, she was the daughter of John and Helen (Marmion) Carey. She entered the Benedictine community on December 8, 1952 and made her profession as a Benedictine Sister on August 23, 1957.

She attended St. Raymond's, Joliet, IL, Immaculate Conception, Streator, IL, and Streator Township High School. Sr. Helen received her bachelor's of arts in English from St. Scholastica College, Duluth, MN, a master's in Philosophy from St. Louis University, St. Louis, MO, and a doctorate in Philosophy from Fordham University, New York, NY.

In her academic ministry, Sr. Helen taught elementary students in Chicago and Wenona, IL, high school students at St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo, IL, Cathedral High School, St. Cloud, MN, and college level students at Immaculate Heart College, Los Angeles, CA, Fordham University, New York, and Centre College, Danville, KY.

Sr. Helen was teaching at Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles, CA in March, 1965 when she heard about the civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, AL. She sought and was given permission by Prioress Mother Clarisse Fallon to participate in the historic march. In the company of 300 who traveled from Los Angeles, Sr. Helen joined the marchers and heard Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s historic speech at the capital. She gave herself to living justice in her relationships with others, especially for those without a voice in society, not only in her work on behalf of civil rights in the 1960's but also for immigrants and those on death row.

Within community, Sr. Helen was elected a Dean of the Sisters of St. Benedict from 1980-1984, serving as a team and Council member with the Prioress and Subprioress. Following her years in teaching, she served as Parish Associate at St. Mark's Parish, Peoria, IL from 1980-85 and was Catholic Chaplain and part-time faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, IL from 1985-1997.

Since 2009, Sr. Helen served in community ministries at St. Mary Monastery. Sr. Helen is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; sister Patricia (Joseph) Morris; half-sister, Colleen (Richard) Barrett; and a sister-in-law (John), Zelma Carey. She was preceded in death by her parents, and brothers, John, and Robert Carey.

# In Memoriam . . .

## St. Mary's Academy Alumnae

**Margaret Colgan Bankie, '44**, died February 2, 2023.

**Mary Ellen Olson, '63**, died August 2, 2023.

**Carol Rouse Dixon, '67**, died July 29, 2023.

**Jayne Valente West, '69**, died May 7, 2023.

**Ardith Wiesbrock Wilson, (x '66)**, died April 21, 2019.

## Oblates

Bloomington, IL Oblate **Marion Gore** died June 6, 2023.

Bloomington, IL Oblate **Sam Mungo** died April 21, 2023.

Farmington, IL Oblate **Gary Schultz** died April 14, 2023.

## Friends

**John Thomas Barnes**, brother of JoAnn Barnes Palmer, '52, died July 15, 2023.

**Joe Brinkerhoff**, husband of Mary Meegan, '62, died June 8, 2023.

**Claudia Cox**, former Benet House Advisory board member, died May 22, 2023.

**Peggy Giltner Gilbert**, sister of Sister Andrea Giltner, died August 14, 2023.

**Nancy Grage**, sister of Terry Martz, Oblate and volunteer, died July 2, 2023.

**John Gull**, son of Bob Gull and stepson of Oblate Jan Gull, died August 2, 2023.

**Bill Haas**, brother of Linda Haas, '67 and Susan Haas Maerz, '68, died June 12, 2023.

**Irene Paeschke**, mother of Mary Ann Koth, St. Mary Monastery Live-In Volunteer, died May 16, 2023.

**Diane Bennett McAnally**, former Sister Lawrence, died July 10, 2023.

**John Popson**, husband of Oblate Martha Popson, died August 16, 2023.

## Alumnae News

Robert "Bob" and JoAnn Barnes Palmer, SMA Class of 1952, celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary, July 26, 2023. Bob is a retired carpenter/cabinet maker and JoAnn a retired first grade teacher.





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Jan Gull, Editor



## Boundless Compassion Retreat

**4-day Retreat: Oct 27 – Oct 31**

\$600 (single); \$575 (dbl); \$425 (commuter)

**Facilitator Training: Nov. 1**

\$130 (single); \$125 (double); \$100 (commuter)

To register: [retreats@smmsisters.org](mailto:retreats@smmsisters.org) or

[www.smmsisters.org/retreats](http://www.smmsisters.org/retreats)

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