

A View of Community



Connecting Point

God With Us...



Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

Dear friends,

Fr. Michael Casey says: “Perhaps the most important preposition in the New Testament is “with.”** Recently we completed the Christmas season, which we celebrated from the beginning of Advent until the Baptism of Jesus Christ, our ‘Emmanuel’ – God-with-us.

Throughout this past year and into this new year, we know and believe that God is ever with us, even when circumstances like the pandemic make it seem otherwise. Was God really there when my neighbor died of COVID? Was God really present when hurricanes hit Honduras twice in nearly as many weeks? Or when the fires destroyed so much of our western states? The answer of course is YES – God is always with us, because God is ever faithful.

Our Benedictine value that we will study this year is that of Community. The word derives directly from ‘*com*’ – meaning with, and ‘*unitas*’ – meaning together. Community is “together with.” We call ourselves a monastic Benedictine community in which we share our lives “together with” one another, to form “one” community. A family is also a community because it too shares its life with each member.

For so many, 2020 was not a “together with” year. In fact, it was anything but that! People could not get together with friends and family. Celebrations were done via Zoom, Facebook, or not at all. As more and more isolation and social distancing (not really very social!) became the norm, we began to recognize the true value and meaning of community in our lives. At the monastery, we recognize our good fortune as community to have had the Sisters here together. Just like so many others, we have not been able to see family or friends, go on vacations, or attend celebrations. Yet, we were together as community each day for prayers, meals, meetings (some by Zoom), parties, and fun times - all at the appropriate distances. And always with masks! But we did not feel alone, because we were not isolated like so many. We kept all of you in our prayers, and daily we continue to say a special prayer, with Benedictines throughout the world, for those who have died from COVID.

To be fully alive and live well, community requires commitment. Just being together in a shared space does not constitute community. Those who choose to share a life with others for a common purpose must commit to that purpose every day. We begin and end each day by blending our voices in prayer and song together. We fill the “in-between” hours with a commitment to seek God together. This life is a call and a gift for which we are grateful. We continue to be grateful for you our friends. We look forward to again sharing our lives with all of you as soon as that is possible. While we wait – we are assured God is still with each and all of us.

Peace and blessings,

Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB

** Michael Casey, OCSO. *Grace: On a Journey to God*. p. 195.



The Blessing of My Community Life

By Sr. Stefanie MacDonald, OSB, Director of Vocations

This year, St. Mary Monastery is focusing on the Benedictine value of Community, including our broader community of employees, oblates and volunteers. The National Religious Vocations Conference (NRVC) and the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) recently conducted a study on religious life across more than 503 religious institutes. The report states that “Many newer members see community life as what is distinctive and most attractive about religious life.” In total, 92% of the people reported that community life was the primary reason they chose their religious community.

Living in community is a key Benedictine value that we practice each day. Sometimes bumping elbows with one another is easy because there is always someone with whom to walk, talk, eat or play dominoes. However, sometimes community life is more challenging because Sisters have quarrels, too!

St. Benedict reminds us to see and honor the divine worth of each Sister. In the Holy Rule, St. Benedict writes, “Wherever Sisters meet, the junior asks her senior for a blessing ... they should each try to be the first to show respect to the other (Rom 12:10).”

Sr. Marilyn Roman has been part of our community for more than 65 years, and shared her thoughts on community:

“Community for me centers around daily prayer and living in the presence of the Lord. Each day at the monastery, we are working side by side, spending time together and being there for each other. Each of us brings ourselves and our unique personalities to community, so living closely together does have challenges. Although we may not agree on every issue, we choose to give and take, to be patient and to respect one another. We are all on the same journey to God.”

- Sr. Marilyn Roman, OSB

The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone, and community requires us to become more Christ-like regardless of our vocation. Each day we choose to live well within community as we offer gratitude for one another, respect differences, grow in patience and live in peace.

If you would like to learn more about life at St. Mary Monastery, contact Sr. Stefanie MacDonald, OSB, Director of Vocations, at smacdonald@smmsisters.org.



St. Mary Monastery employees Bob Essary, Sr., Beverly Mathis, and Susan Albertson

Profiles in Service

Three employees celebrate 20 year anniversaries



Susan Albertson

While working as a baker at Augustana College in 1999, the property south of Susan's family home in Rock Island was purchased by St. Mary

Monastery. As she watched the new construction, Susan responded to a job posting for baker and food prep cook at the new monastery.

As food service manager, Sr. Bobbi Bussan remembers Susan saying at her interview, "If you hire me, this will be my last job." Susan shares, "I'm so grateful this community took a chance on me, and provided a wonderful opportunity for me to grow spiritually and professionally."

Sr. Bobbi has many memories with Susan in the early years, including travel to food shows, trying new products and planning special community dinners.

"We are very fortunate to have Susan's food experience in the kitchen, and her care for our community is felt far beyond the Sister's Dining Room."

- Sr. Bobbi Bussan, OSB

As food service manager, what Susan treasures most are the relationships she developed with each Sister, with times of conversation and prayer. Susan adds, "When my Dad developed cancer and died in 2010, the Sisters cared for me with encouraging words and prayers, then planted a Redbud tree down by the lake in memory of him."

Susan lives north of the lake behind the monastery and enjoys spending time with her husband Lloyd, and children Shane, Torie and Greg.



Bob Essary, Sr.

Bob Essary was the first employee hired at St. Mary Monastery in Rock Island. Although he wasn't looking for a job, Bob was intrigued by the ad for a maintenance engineer.

As maintenance and physical plant engineer, Bob is responsible for monastery buildings and grounds, supervisor of housekeeping staff, and fleet manager. Often reminding fellow employees that "the monastery is the Sisters home," Bob's work reflects his deep admiration and respect for the community. Bob shared, "Since my first day at work, I've been

amazed by the faith, compassion and hard work ethic of these remarkable women.”

Bob plays a key role in the improvement of the monastery buildings and grounds. In 2001, he helped turn on the first pump of the geothermal system, and twenty years later, he will oversee the installation of solar panels on the monastery grounds.

“Our community has been blessed with Bob’s presence among us these past 20 years. He has shared a calm attitude in relating to all the Sisters as well as caring for our buildings and managing other staff in the department. We have been very fortunate to have Bob part of our Benedictine family.”

- Sr. Sheila McGrath, OSB

Bob and his wife Annette have been married 44 years, and live on a 250 acre farm in Viola, IL.



Beverly Mathis

Since the Sisters moved to the new monastery in 2001, Beverly has worked as the night shift Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) in Health Care. Looking back 20 years to the interview, Beverly remembers, “I was so nervous when Sisters Susan Hutchens and Marilyn Roman interviewed me for the position, but they immediately put me at ease by asking about my children.”

There have been many medical and technology improvements through the years, but it is the Sisters who bring meaning to Beverly’s work. “I love caring for each Sister, and they also care for me. When my mother died in 2002, Sister Helen Highfill helped me through the grieving process. Sr. Mary Jane Wallace fell in love with my grandson, and used to say Marcus was her boyfriend! When I ask for prayers, I know the Sisters are faithful to pray for me.”

“Beverly is a genuine person...who you see is who you get! The Sisters feel very comfortable in her care. She is compassionate and professional in all she does.”

- Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB

Beverly lives in Silvis and enjoys spending time with her three daughters Stephanie, Andria, and Samantha along with her grandchildren Vanessa, Marcus, Laryn and Alana. Beverly hopes to retire at St. Mary Monastery, adding “this place is so calming to me.”



Sr. Catherine Cleary, OSB, Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB, Sr. Ruth Ksycki, OSB, and Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB

Community Lived Through the Years

When St. Benedict wrote his Rule for monks in the 5th century, his primary focus was on those “who belong to a monastery, where they serve under a rule and an abbot or prioress” (RB 1:2). From the beginning, Benedict expected his monks would live in communities, committed to a common life including prayer, work, and meals together, while witnessing to one another by their fidelity to Christ.

Through many changes over the years, the community has witnessed that when love is present, and commitment is strong, they can unite as one under Christ through prayer, stability, mutual obedience, simplicity, humility and reconciliation.

Sr. Catherine Cleary, Prioress 1980-1988

When Sr. Catherine was elected Prioress, the community had 100 members with teachers in seven schools in Illinois, one in Munster, IN, and one in Birmingham AL. Sisters also served in parishes, social work and nursing care. Throughout her years as Prioress, Sr. Catherine continued to focus on furthering the education of sisters so their ministries could remain relevant within the church and society.

When her Prioress term ended, Sr. Catherine spent a sabbatical year studying in Chicago, including a trip to the Holy Land where she studied the region’s

history and grew her love for the Jewish and Palestinian people. In 2004, she established the Muslim-Christian Women’s Dialog in Rock Island, after learning of the on-going fighting between Israel and Palestine. She shared, “I couldn’t bear to see what was happening there and thought, we must be peacemakers here.”

In 2013, the Dialog expanded to include the Jewish Women of Temple Emmanuel, and today the group is known as “Interfaith Women’s Dialogues.” Sr. Catherine added, “We are all children of God, and that realization is the first step towards peace.”

Sr. Ruth Ksycki, Prioress 1996-2004

Just months before the community voted to close St. Mary’s Academy in Nauvoo, Sr. Ruth Ksycki was elected Prioress.

“As often as anything important is to be done in the monastery, the Prioress shall call the whole community together and explain what the business is; and after hearing the advice of the members, let her ponder it and follow what she judges the wiser course.”

- Rule of Benedict 3:1

Sr. Ruth noted, “I didn’t realize at the time how this chapter of the Rule, with the movement of the Holy Spirit, would become a guiding principle during my leadership.”

The process of discernment showed the community how “to listen with the ear of our heart” (RB Prologue) in a new way to help us discern making difficult decisions prayerfully and inclusively. Sr. Ruth is awed that the decision to close the Academy and move to Rock Island, though not without pain and tears, was peaceful and life-giving.

Sr. Ruth continued, “As we mark our 20th year in Rock Island, we have been given so many ways to serve the people in the Quad Cities area and have received so much in return. We have never forgotten the foundation of our roots in Nauvoo, and the many areas in which we have served throughout the Diocese of Peoria and beyond. I pray that we will continue to serve ‘so that in all things God may be glorified’” (RB 57:9).

Sr. Sandra Brunenn, Prioress 2012-2020

When asked what stands out about the St. Mary Monastery community, Sr. Sandra recalls how the Sisters support and challenge each other. “This practice is such a catalyst for our own personal growth and our ability collectively to offer contributions to others,” added Sr. Sandra.

The structure of shared prayer and the example of others keeps the community faithful to the monastic way of life.

Sr. Sandra continued, “Taken together, the community initiated educational opportunities for all ages, encouraged pastoral care and spiritual growth, and provided service to and with the poor in ways no one of us could have accomplished on our own. These opportunities have included grade school teaching, St Mary’s Academy, and the Benet House Retreat Center.”

Under Sr. Sandra’s leadership, the monastery recently formed a Creation Care Team to strengthen

their commitment to care for the Earth. In 2020, the community improved its recycling program by adding TerraCycle materials, and made improvements to the monastery grounds. Other projects including holding an eco-spirituality overnight retreat at Benet House are delayed due to the pandemic.



St. Mary Monastery Community, 2019

Sr. Susan Hutchens, Prioress Elected 2020

Since 1874, the St. Mary Monastery community has continued to live as one in Christ, even amidst great blessings and severe hardships. Sr. Susan noted, “The community persevered when all was lost in the early 1900’s, flourished when we built new monastery and school buildings, adjusted as new Sisters entered the community, and when many left the community in the 1960’s-70’s.”

Today at 26 members, the community is similar in size to the St. Mary Monastery community in 1899, and no less committed to oneness in Christ and to each other as the Sisters were then. Sr. Susan continued, “Looking toward 2021, we are ready to serve those in need, whether through our Retreat Center, schools, job training for those being released from jail, providing food for those in need, clothing and household items for women seeking employment and independence, volunteering in hospitals, and always with prayers when they are requested.”

In closing, Sr. Susan shared, “Living in community teaches us that life continues to change, and we must be open to it. We continue to discern together as we look to the future and what it may bring to our life together as Benedictines of the 21st century, that we may share the blessing of community with others. May the God of surprises be ever with us!”

There is a Time for Everything

By Sr. Ruth Ksycki, OSB

A time for hope to be reborn,
A time for cynicism to die.

A time to plant the seeds of inclusion,
A time to uproot alienation.

A time to “kill” the sin of racism,
A time to heal with justice and compassion.

A time to tear down barriers,
A time to build up with welcome and hospitality.

A time to weep for loss of integrity,
A time to dance in truth and freedom.

A time to discard stones of derision,
A time to gather and build with stones of respect.

A time to social distance and wear masks,
A time to embrace when Covid-19 is over.

A time to seek peace,
A time to renounce violence.

A time to keep self-respect,
A time to cast away self-promotion.

A time to rend the garment of division,
A time to sew the seams of community.

A time to be silent and pray,
A time to speak of God’s love.

A time to love with a generous heart,
A time to abandon selective love.

A time to end war that “kills” body and spirit,
A time to share peace that loves into life.

THE TIME IS NOW!

November 2020





21 Candles for Peace

By Oblate Jean Wolf

*Jesus spoke to them, again, saying, "I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

John 8:12

The evening of October 14, 2020, I lit the first of 21 candles I would light over the next three weeks leading up to the elections. Thus, began a candle light vigil in our home. My hope was that lighting candles each night would alleviate the tension I was feeling as Election Day approached.

There was an intentionality as I lit each candle, exhaling the darkness and inhaling the light, focusing my thoughts on a safe, fair and peaceful election, and repeating a few words or saying a prayer. This process reversed, when I extinguished each candle, said a prayer, inhaled the light and exhaled the darkness.

The 21st candle, lit on the evening of November 3rd, was a new candle with a peace sign attached. Lighting this candle over the next few days, I prayed for a safe and peaceful response to the election.

There was a calming effect as I lit candles for 21 nights, one that positively impacted my own well-being, as well as the well-being of those around me.

The vigil was a way to focus on Christ as the light of the world, and prince of peace.

On January 18th, I once more lit the peace candle, with prayers for a peaceful transition on Inauguration Day. Again, I experienced a calming effect from the process of lighting, then extinguishing the candle.

Candles play many roles in our personal and communal lives. This candlelight vigil was a way of watching and waiting, of asking for intercessions, of remembering, of providing light in the darkness, and of seeking peace. The following lyrics to a song come to mind:

*"It is better to light just one little candle
Than to stumble in the dark.
If everyone lit just one little candle,
What a bright world this would be."*

- One Little Candle
George Mysels, Joseph Maloy Roach,
1952



A Call for Peace and Justice

Following the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, Oblate Madeleine Callahan participated in an emergency Zoom meeting with faith leaders of The McLean County IL Interfaith Alliance. Their purpose is to build mutually beneficial relationships among people of different faith groups for dialogue, service and support. The members prayed together for our country and then wrote a collaborative statement condemning the violent events that resulted in loss of lives and desecration of the U.S. Capitol. Madeleine is a member of the Bloomington-Normal, IL Oblate group.



Sr. Mary Jane Wallace, OSB

Sr. Mary Jane Wallace, OSB 1929 - 2020

Sr. Mary Jane Wallace, OSB, died Tuesday, October 27, 2020 at the monastery. Born in Creston, Iowa on April 3, 1929, she was the daughter of Francis and Helen (Harvey) Wallace. Sr. Mary Jane entered the Benedictine community in August, 1947 and made her final profession July 11, 1952.

She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from St. Ambrose College, Davenport, Iowa, and pursued graduate studies in music education at the University of Illinois, Champaign, Illinois. She then received her Certificate in Theology from St. Norbert's College, DePere, Wisconsin.

A longtime teacher, her ministry included teaching at St. Mary's School, Moline, IL, St. Columba's School, Chicago, IL, Holy Family School, Peoria, IL, Sts. Peter and Paul School, Nauvoo, IL, St. Mary's Academy Nauvoo, IL, St. Thomas More School, Munster, IN and at Seton School, Moline, IL. Sr. Mary Jane served at St. Mary Monastery as House Coordinator and Secretary to the Prioress. Until her death, she taught music lessons to adults and children at St. Mary Monastery.

Sr. Mary Jane is survived by her Benedictine Sisters and cousins and was preceded in death by her parents and her infant brother, Leo.

We miss her deeply. We know that her joy is complete as she joins her voice with the choirs of Heaven.

In Memoriam . . .

Alumnæ

Catherine Barrett, mother of Jo Barrett, '80 died January 16, 2021

Mary Kay (Freeberg) Duncan, '56 died January 4, 2021

Colleen Dwyer, mother of Debby Dwyer Giese, '76, sister of Kathleen Larosche, '63 and sister of Sister Sheila McGrath, died November 20, 2020

Martha Jo Fraser, '66 died December 13, 2018

Maureen (Mo) Howe Hauersperger, '53 died December 22, 2020

Maggie Ryan Heuermann, '68 died June 19, 2020

Terry White Hurst, '59 died January 22, 2021

Daniel Leander, husband, and **Danelle Leander**, daughter of Desnie Perez Leander, '65 died April 2, 2001 and January 10, 2021, respectively

Becky Horn Stout, '59 died December 12, 2020

Christina Haas Weber, '67 died December 9, 2020

Family

Thomas Fulton Cleary, brother of Sister Catherine Cleary, died January 14, 2021

Larry Walsh, father of Sister Jackie Walsh, died December 15, 2020

Oblates

Jack Cain, husband of Oblate Laura Cain, died September 21, 2020

Friends

Ann Aubry Chully, formerly Sister Mary Richard Aubry, died April 5, 2020

Therese Gyure, friend and teacher at St. Thomas More School, Munster, IN, died December 24, 2020

Mildred Loncka, mother of Janet Loncka LoGalbo, formerly Sister Jeanette Loncka, died December 30, 2020



The cover photo of this Connecting Point was provided by Eric Maurer, who is a Food Service employee for the monastery. Eric enjoys his hobby of taking aerial photos with his drone. We thank him for sharing his talents with us.



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

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #59
Rock Island, IL

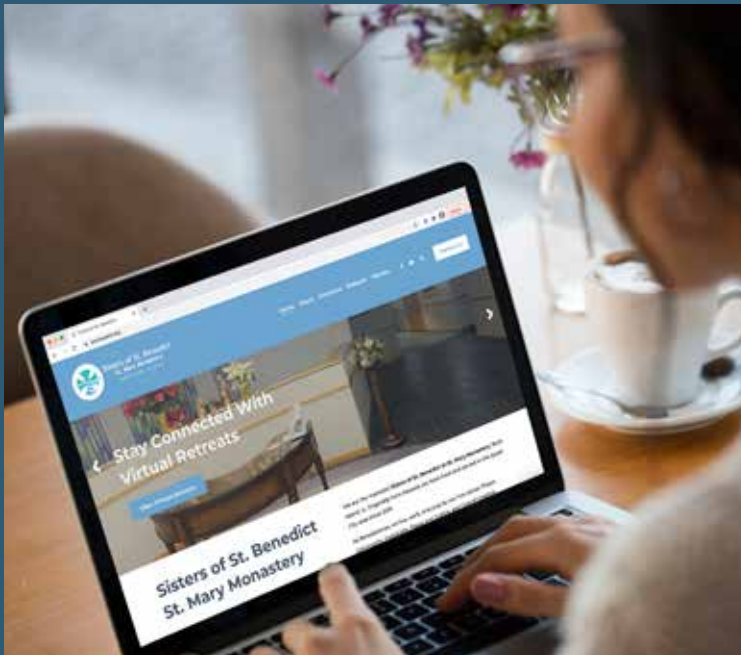
Return Service Requested

*Published by the Benedictine Sisters of
St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island, IL 61201*

Phone: 309-283-2100

Editor
Jan Gull
jgull@smmsisters.org

www.smmsisters.org



Check Out Our New Website!

- Updated calendars for events
- Expanded St. Mary's Academy section
- New Volunteer section
- Virtual tours
- Newsletter sign ups

Website developed by Mandle Design, Inc.,
Davenport, Iowa

**Would you prefer to receive a
digital copy of Connecting Point?**

Please email us at:
jgull@smmsisters.org