

Benet House Turns 20



**Connecting
Point**

As Seasons Change



Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

Springtime is the time to recognize God in all that surrounds us – in the colors of nature’s growth, new buds on flowers and trees, new shades of green we’ve never noticed before.

Springtime is the offering made by our gracious Creator of new life after what appeared to be the dying of winter; after the Death of Jesus on Good Friday, we experience the Resurrection of Christ on Easter Sunday.

Spring can be called a “fickle” season. Here in the Midwest, whether we call it a late or early Spring, we feel a change in the atmosphere – a thawing of the ground. We see and hear the first bird call.

But then it snows another 4” (or more!) and we ask: “Hey God, what gives?” We were so ready to welcome the warmth. God dangles the sun and melting before us – but Spring is still out of reach. One day can be beautiful and 70° and literally the next morning we wake to frost covering the ground. That happened in April – twice!

More than any other season, Spring reveals the changeability, the febleness of life. Yet, as Spring becomes Summer, these seasons present for us the miracle of regenerated life born in our hearts and lives each day.

Living in this Easter time of Resurrection, we experience new life and new energy this year following the last two years of unrelenting worry and concern over the pandemic. Yet we welcome this Resurrection time in the midst of a reality more dark and agonizing than even the pandemic. This is the unreality of the war being fought in Ukraine.

We are grateful for your contributions to the Alliance for International Monasticism (AIM) that have enabled us with their assistance to send thousands of dollars to the Benedictine communities of Sisters in Ukraine and in Poland. These communities are still aiding the refugees in need of so many essential items and care, as they flee Ukraine, remain with the Sisters, or return to Ukraine. To you we say “Thank You!” with all our hearts.

Marcel Proust is quoted as having said “The only true voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes.” May we see the beauty of all that surrounds us at this time of year – not because it is different than ever before, but because we have new eyes with which to view it – eyes of awareness, love, welcome, and gratitude.

Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

A Reflection on 20 Years of Benet House

As Benet House acknowledges 20 years of service to the community and the church in Rock Island, Sr. Bobbi reflects on the experience of the community over the years.

As Director, what brings you joy?

Offering programs to people of all faiths that enrich their spiritual journey energizes me and deepens my own spiritual journey.

What makes this a unique retreat setting?

Since Benet House is connected to a monastery, retreatants are able to join the Sisters for prayer in the Chapel and share a meal together. I like our mission to provide only spiritual programs, rather than any general programs like at a large conference center. Although we are close to a large city, retreats are held in a contemplative setting on our peaceful monastery grounds.

What prompts gratitude within you?

I'm grateful for the former Directors of Benet House, and how their vision led us here today. Centering Prayer formed under Sr. Catherine Cleary, OSB, has expanded to include an eight day post intensive centering prayer retreat. In the past we always had a retreat based on Thomas Merton and now we have a monthly Merton group that started during the pandemic, and recently committed to a third year of studying Merton.

Tell us about recent changes

Benet House is now open for in-person retreats, in addition to continuing virtual retreats with state of the art technology. Last year we expanded our staff to include a Program Assistant, Lorene Knobbe, to help with program planning and retreat coverage.



Sr. Bobbi

Identify an exciting sign post for the future

Boundless Compassion is a program founded 16 years ago by Sr. Joyce Rupp, OSM (Order of Servants of Mary), located in Omaha, NE. In 2021, Sr. Joyce stepped away from leadership, and the Boundless Compassion program became headquartered at Benet House. I have accepted a role as co-director, with Wendy Mospan, Palatine, IL.





Lorene Knobbe, Sr. Jackie Walsh, OSB, and Sr. Bobbi Bussan, OSB

Benet House - Celebrating 20 Years

In 1997, the St. Mary Monastery community made the difficult decision to close St. Mary's Academy. The Sisters chose to move to Rock Island, IL, and wanted to provide a ministry for people in their new location. Their existing guest and retreat house on the monastery grounds in Nauvoo, IL provided the community vision for the Benet House Retreat Center in Rock Island, IL.

Sr. Susan Hutchens, current Prioress, shared that the decisions were made through the discernment process and with great reverence. "It was a very faith-filled time, and we were totally open to the Spirit guiding us," stated Sr. Susan. After selling the buildings in Nauvoo, the community purchased land in Rock Island and chose an architect for the monastery and retreat house.

Completed in 2001, the 7,700 square-foot Benet House Guest and Retreat Center was built to be both a guest house and a quiet place of prayer and solitude. The original section included a meeting room, an office, an oratory, two living spaces with kitchens and 12 private bedrooms to house up to 24 retreatants.

Sr. Catherine Cleary, OSB, led the new and rapidly expanding retreat ministry, and served as Director of Benet House from 2002 to 2005.

"We began offering a variety of retreat options, and every year the number of retreatants continued to grow," shared Sr. Catherine. By 2006, the expanding retreat needs led the community to make a decision regarding additional space.

The new 5,100 square-foot addition was completed in 2009, and included a large meeting room, kitchen, offices and two additional private bedrooms. A hermitage was included with a kitchen, sitting room and bedroom/bath.

Responsible Stewardship

During the planning of Benet House, the Sisters, building committee and the architect shared a common vision of using resources wisely.

The new Benet House addition employs geothermal heating and cooling, and a "green" elevator – one that doesn't use hydraulic fluids.

A rain garden was designed to control water runoff and protect the soil.

In 2021, the infrastructure of Benet House was upgraded with new furnaces and air conditioning units. An array of solar modules provide electricity to meet approximately 80% of the needs for Benet House.

Sr. Charlotte Sonnevile, OSB, served as Director of Benet House from 2005 to 2015. “Our community vision was for God to fill every room in Benet House with the spirit of hospitality as we welcomed and cared for our guests and retreatants,” said Sr. Charlotte.

Benet House Today

Sr. Roberta (Bobbi) Bussan, OSB, has served as Director of the Benet House Retreat Center since 2014, and was also appointed Subprioress of St. Mary Monastery in June, 2020. She currently serves as co-chair of the U.S. Association of Benedictine Retreat Centers.

Sr. Bobbi leads Benet House with an unwavering spirit of resilience and hope. When Benet House closed its doors in March 2020 due to the global pandemic, Sr. Bobbi created virtual Benet House programs to support retreatants during uncertain times.

During the 16 month period while the monastery was closed, Benet House held a number of virtual retreats in addition to weekly and monthly ongoing retreats. The programs drew participants from across the United States and Canada, and as far away as Ireland and New Zealand.

Since 2008, Sr. Jackie Walsh has served as Administrative Assistant at Benet House, scheduling retreats, receiving registrations, and arranging guest accommodations. In 2019, Sr. Jackie earned her Certificate in Spiritual Direction from the Spiritual Guidance Training Program in Racine, WI and currently serves as a Spiritual Director.



Benet House Retreat Center

Lorene Knobbe joined the Benet House team in 2021 as Program Assistant, and is responsible for coordinating the volunteer program and assisting with retreat programs. Lorene and her husband are active in their parish in Davenport, IA. She also serves on the Davenport Diocesan Board of Education and is an active facilitator for Boundless Compassion.

Over 20 years ago, the St. Mary Monastery community built the Benet House Retreat Center as a unique retreat setting for people of all faiths to seek the Holy One. This mission has not changed. God continues to bless the community’s Benet House ministry. We invite you to come visit us!

**“Peace be with this house
and with all who will come
here as our guests.”**

**THE BLESSING OF BENET HOUSE
OCTOBER 15, 2002**

Connecting Point Briefs

Sisters' Retreat

The St. Mary Monastery community held their annual retreat June 4 – 10 at the monastery. The retreat theme was “Women in the Gospel of John” with Dr. Bonnie Thurston as director. After years as an academic, Bonnie Thurston resigned a Chair and Professorship in New Testament to live quietly in her home state of West Virginia. She is author or editor of 23 theological books and 8 collections of poetry. She contributes to scholarly and popular periodicals, is an internationally known Merton Scholar, and an avid reader, gardener, cook and classical music lover.



Postulant Janna Newell

The community welcomed Janna Newell as a postulant on November 14, 2021. During her postulancy, Janna is accompanied by her Director, Sr. Sandra Brunenn, and the Sisters as she continues discerning her vocation to religious life: seeking a relationship with God, learning more about The Rule of St. Benedict, and growing in this monastic community.

Bishop Louis Tylka

At the invitation of the Sisters, Bishop Louis Tylka attended Vespers and dinner at the monastery on May 16, 2022. During the visit, Bishop Tylka was given a tour of the monastery and Benet House. The Bishop spoke to the Sisters about his new role and hopes for the Diocese, and the Sisters sang their blessing to him before he departed.

Federation Chapter

The Federation of St. Benedict of which St. Mary Monastery is a member will be holding its triannual Federation Chapter in July. It will be held at Saint Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, MN from July 19 – 25. Sr. Susan Hutchens, Prioress and Sisters Marianne Burkhard and Stefanie MacDonald, delegates, will represent the community. At this gathering, the 10 member monasteries will conduct business, look toward the future and elect a new Federation President.



Raised Beds

New garden beds were installed to provide more accessible gardening for the Sisters to enjoy a harvest of fresh produce.

SMA Alumnae Highlight

SMA Alum, Mary Ann Weakley, '53

St. Mary's Academy Alum, Mary Ann Cahill Weakley, Class of '53 recently published her second book, *Faith Unshaken*, a novel. Her first book, *Monastery to Matrimony* is a memoir of her years before, during and after her life in St. Mary Monastery.

Mary Ann entered the community of Benedictine Sisters after her senior year at SMA, took vows and received the name Sister Mary Magdalen. During several teaching assignments in Illinois Catholic schools, she received her BS in Business Education from Marycrest College in Davenport, IA and was assigned to the Business Department at St. Mary's Academy. While teaching and acting as Residence Hall Prefect she earned her M. Ed. at the University of Illinois in summer school. She served as Dean of Students at St. Mary's Academy before being assigned to Alleman High School in Rock Island.

In 1973, Mary Ann left the community, moved to Arlington Heights, IL, and accepted a position as Administrative Assistant at St. Viator High School. This led to her role as Assistant Principal in charge of curriculum development and teacher evaluations. During those years Mary Ann met and married her husband, Harold Weakley, from Bement, Illinois, her home town. After thirteen years at St. Viator, Mary Ann and Harold moved to Tennessee. When he passed away in 2009, Mary Ann moved to Florida where she continues to live and write.

Weakley's second book, *Faith Unshaken*, relates a piece of St. Mary Monastery and St. Mary's Academy history in the early foundation years, told through the lives of Sister Aloysia (Rose) Beecher, 1890 SMA grad, and Mother Mary Pahlman, Prioress from 1913 – 1919.

During the early 1900's, years of community financial hardship, Sister Aloysia and Mother Mary Pahlman decided "for the sake of their souls", they must leave their convent and establish a new community. Joined by Sister Ruth Cullen, the three

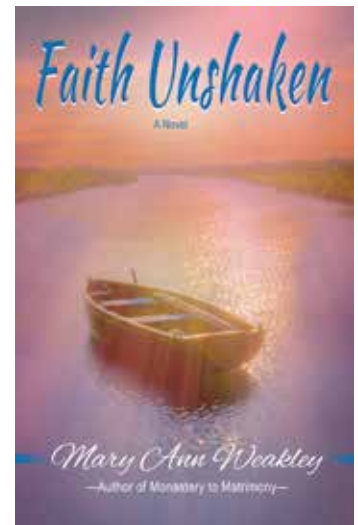


Mary Ann Cahill Weakley

left their beloved idyllic Nauvoo only to be met with obstacles from clergy, forcing them to the frozen tundra of Canada to pursue their dream of a new convent.

The three women, each with remarkable talents, wove their strands of individual courage together with one dedicated purpose—a dream guided by faith, never shaken no matter the impediments set in their path.

Both of Weakley's books are available on Amazon, or from her at maweakley4@gmail.com.





L to R: Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB, Sr. Rita Cain, OSB, and Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB

Sr. Rita Cain and Sr. Sandra Brunenn Celebrate Jubilees

[Requiescat in pace: Sr. Rita went home to God on June 2, 2022]

During Vespers on March 12, 2022, Sr. Rita Cain, OSB, celebrated her 70th jubilee and Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB, celebrated her 60th jubilee at St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island. Sr. Susan Hutchens, Prioress, spoke about their combined 130 years of lives dedicated to God, to the St. Mary Monastery community and to the service of others.

“Luigi Gioia, OSB has stated: The way of fulfilling the injunction: ‘Nothing must come before the love of Christ’ – is by caring for one another in community. All we give to community culminates in arriving ‘all together’ one day in everlasting life. Living together in community has always been and still is our ‘mission’. The fidelity of both Sr. Rita and Sr. Sandra to this mission has shown brightly before God, and today we are blessed by their light.

And so, we celebrate, rejoice, and express our gratitude to them and to God who directed them here and supported them along the way to this very day.”

- Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB, Prioress

Sr. Rita Cain, OSB

Sr. Rita was born in Ivesdale, Illinois, the 11th of 12 children. Rita’s parents gave Rita and her siblings a rich Catholic heritage filled with a love for family and learning. Raised on a farm, she learned the joy and freedom of open space and time shared with family. Rita spent her last two years of high school at St. Mary’s Academy in Nauvoo, and entered St. Mary Priory in August of 1950. She made her profession on August 22, 1952. After graduating with a B.A. in Music Ed from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, Sr. Rita earned an M.S. in Religious Studies from St. John’s University in Collegeville, MN. She did post-graduate work in Political Science at both Iowa State University in Ames, IA, and the University of Iowa in Iowa City, IA.



For 18 years, Sr. Rita taught in schools staffed by the Benedictine Sisters. In Illinois, Sr. Rita taught at St. Columba’s, Chicago, St. Mary’s, Moline, St. John the Baptist, Clinton, and St. Boniface in Peoria. She also taught at St. Thomas More in Munster, IN. Sr. Rita served as Director of Religious Education at St. John Vianney Parish in Bettendorf, IA for three years and as Director of Adult Education for the Davenport

Diocese for one year. In 1975, Sr. Rita began working for the Iowa Department of Human Services as a Family Social Worker, and remained with them, until her retirement in 1998.

At that time, she returned to St. Mary Monastery, where she served the community in various positions, and as community archivist from 1999 until 2009.

Sr. Rita never missed prayers, community meetings or gatherings at the monastery. She enjoyed visiting, and having a chat about times past or current events.



Sr. Rita signs her 70th Jubilee Renewal of Profession

Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB

Sr. Sandra was born in Joliet, Illinois. Sandra and her younger sister Jill were raised in a home that valued their Catholic faith, learning and experiences in the outdoors. Regular visits to their grandparents' farm and family vacations featuring fishing were early experiences that fostered Sandra's life-long love for Earth.



Sandra entered St. Mary Priory in Nauvoo in the Fall of 1960 and made her profession of vows July 11, 1962. After graduating with a B.A. in Mathematics from St. Ambrose College in Davenport, IA, Sr. Sandra earned an M.A. in Math Ed from Ohio State University and in Religious Education from Seattle University, and an M.A. in Religious Formation from St. Louis University.

Reflecting on her vocation, Sr. Sandra shared "I was attracted to the lifestyle of the Sisters: centered in prayer and community and service. The Benedictine promise of stability was especially attractive to me as I experienced it in the high school year I spent with the Sisters of St. Benedict in Beech Grove, IN."

In Illinois, Sr. Sandra taught at Holy Family in Peoria, St. Anthony's in Atkinson, St. Mary's Academy in Nauvoo, and Alleman High School in Rock Island. She served as a campus minister for five years at St. John's Catholic Newman Center at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

In addition, Sr. Sandra worked in religious education and was pastoral associate at Sacred Heart in Moline, and at Sts. Peter and Paul in Nauvoo, Mary, Our Lady of Peace in Orion, and St. Maria Goretti in Coal Valley. Sr. Sandra served two terms as Prioress at St. Mary Monastery, from 2012 to 2020. She is currently the Director of Initial Formation for the community.

"Blessed are they who have kept the word with a generous heart and reap a harvest of love through perseverance."

LUKE 8:15



Sr. Mary C. Core, OSB

Sr. Mary C. Core, OSB, 1948-2022

Sr. Mary Core, OSB, died March 27, 2022 at the monastery.

Mary was born in Sterling, Illinois, a daughter of Darrell and Anna Jane Core. She attended St. Anne's School, East Moline, IL and Alleman High School, Rock Island, IL. She earned her B.A. from St. Xavier University, Chicago, IL and her M.A. from St. Meinrad School of Theology, St. Meinrad, IN.

Sr. Mary entered the Benedictine community on September 10, 1967 and made her profession on June 21, 1969. Sr. Mary's ministry included many years teaching in Illinois at Nauvoo, Macomb, Monmouth, Chicago, St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo, Bergan High School, Peoria and St. Bede Academy, Peru. She served in Youth Ministry at St. Joseph Parish, Pekin, IL, St. Maria Goretti Parish, Coal Valley, IL, Mary Our Lady of Peace, Orion, IL and Our Lady of Victory, Davenport, IA. Sr. Mary served as Initial Formation Director and Liturgy Director for St. Mary Monastery.

She is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; her brothers, James (Angela) Core, Spokane Valley, WA and, Richard (Susan) Core, Los Angeles, CA; her sisters, Lois (Steven) Pinto, New Bedford, MA, and Rita (Wayne) Pacha, Eldridge, IA; and nieces and nephews.



Sr. Rita Cain, OSB

Sr. Rita Cain, OSB, 1932-2022

Sr. Rita Cain, OSB, died June 2, 2022 at the monastery.

Rita was born in Ivesdale, IL, a daughter of Joseph and Julia Donovan Cain. She attended Casey Public School Colfax Township, St. Joseph Secondary School, Ivesdale, and graduated from St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo, IL. She received her B.S. from University of Illinois, Champaign, IL and her M.S. from St. John's University, Collegeville, MN.

Sr. Rita entered the Benedictine community on August 15, 1950 and made her profession on August 22, 1952.

Sr. Rita's ministry included teaching in Illinois at St. Columba's, Chicago, St. Mary's, Moline, St. John the Baptist, Clinton, St. Boniface, Peoria, and St. Thomas More, Munster, IN. She served in Religious Education at St. John Vianney, Bettendorf, IA, and as Director of Adult Education with the Diocese of Davenport. From 1975-1998, she worked with the Iowa Department of Social Services in family therapy. Upon retirement, she served as Community Archivist along with other roles at St. Mary Monastery.

She is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; two sisters, Mary Pat (Imelda) Cain and Sheila Cain Butler; brother-in-law, Don Butler; and many nieces and nephews. Sr. Rita was preceded in death by her parents; brothers, John Cain, Paul Cain, Carroll Cain; and sisters, Mae Loomis, Myrtle Strickland, Catherine Krupa, Joan Marzullo, Regina Schumacher, and Patricia Jackson.

In Memoriam . . .

Alumnæ

Mary Margaret (Cabalek) Rund, '47, died on February 5, 2022.

Sr. Rita Cain, OSB '50, died June 2, 2022, sister of **Patricia Cain Jackson '48**, **Mary Pat (Imelda) Cain, '46**, **Sheila Cain Butler '53**. Aunt of **Donna Schumacher Sheehan, '67**, **Julie Schumacher '68**, **Sharon Schumacher '70**, **Beth Schumacher Brown '71**, **Ann Schumacher Mason '79**, **Christy Cain Schmidgall '67**.

Patricia Murphy Gaughan '49, died April 20, 2022, daughter of **Rose McNally Murphy, 1918**, (deceased), sister of **Sr. Rosemary Murphy '42**, (deceased), sister of **Kathleen Murphy O'Donnell '43**, (deceased), sister of **Mary Anne Murphy McHugh '47**, (deceased,) and sister of **Sr. Margaret Murphy '54**.

Oblates

Bill Zeter died April 21, 2022, husband of **Oblate Mary K. Zeter**.

Friends

Jim Fisher died April 23, 2022, husband of **Paulette Hansen Fisher '65** and St. Mary Monastery Volunteer.

Peter Frati died February 27, 2022, husband of **Helen Hennessey '64**.

Mario died June 2, 2022, husband of **Lolita Lopez '74**.

Frances Markey died March 17, 2022, mother of **Barbara Markey Mika '71**.

Jack O'Donnell died May 5, 2022, son of **Kathleen Murphy O'Donnell '43**, (deceased), grandson of **Rose McNally Murphy, 1918**, (deceased), nephew of **Sr. Rosemary Murphy '42**, (deceased), **Mary Anne Murphy McHugh '47**, (deceased), **Patricia Murphy Gaughan '49**, (deceased) and **Sr. Margaret Murphy '54**.

Class of '65 gathers on May 6th at the Landmark Café in Galesburg, IL.



Left (bottom to top): Shirley Pecharich McElvain, Jane Amann Wolgemuth, Suzanne Stickelmeier Schierer, Rosie McBride Ossont, Peggy Weber Siegfried, Patty Haas Henson

Right (top to bottom): Mary Croegaert Buysse, Andy Abrams Corbett, Paulette Hansen Fisher, Barbara Glueckert Bryzgalski, Dianne Wood Adkisson





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
US 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

Communications@smmsisters.org

www.smmsisters.org

Jan Gull, Editor



Upcoming Retreat:

Be Still and Know that I am God
A 3-Day Directed Retreat

**Sunday, July 10, 5:15 p.m. –
Wednesday, July 13, 1:00 p.m.**

**Time with a spiritual director, Vespers with the
Sisters and communal prayers**

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

Please email us at:
Communications@smmsisters.org