

Coming Home



Connecting Point



Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

Connections

As I write, we have just begun Holy Week – a week in which sorrow is turned to joy for all Christians with the Resurrection of Christ. Christ’s death meant LIFE for all eternity. It is a week that connects us to ALL people – because we as humans, are ALL created in the image of God and saved by the act of LOVE given by Christ.

And if that is true, we are ALL connected.

This time of year presents New Life to us on a daily basis. What seemed dead in the ground begins to sprout again. The earth awakens and returns to its bounty and beauty. But not everywhere; not where it has been ravaged by mining, loss of habitat for wildlife or war. Each of us acting in Christ’s name is to bring new life to the world by our actions of care, peace and love.

Spring becomes Summer almost immediately in some places. Their connection is continuous. In multiple and un-named ways we are connected with each other, with the earth, with all of life. Even some animals can almost read the mind of their owners at times. That is connection. We are learning all the time that there are ever greater connections between our earth, the entire universe, and the petals of a flower.

We know the value of our Connections – especially with the people who have entered our lives and shared theirs with us. That is the meaning behind the title of this newsletter – “Connecting Point.” These connections with you our friends have been nurtured over nearly 150 years! We want to maintain our connections with you – whether in person, via phone, on the internet or through this newsletter. Our lives as Benedictine Sisters have been blessed by you.

This coming Fall, we will begin our 150th year as the Benedictine community of St. Mary Monastery. We were founded in 1874 in Nauvoo, IL and moved in 2001 to our home here in Rock Island, IL. These nearly 150 years have been filled with blessings – graces beyond counting. You are all a part of those blessings.

Our gratitude overflows for the connection we share with you, and you are daily remembered in our prayers.

Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

Summer Retreat Opportunities

By Sr. Bobbi Bussan, OSB, Director of Benet House

Summer is a favorite season at the monastery as we welcome longer days of sunlight and extended time outdoors. In addition to daily Lauds and Vespers, many of us enjoy gardening, harvesting vegetables and sharing meals on the monastery patios.

Benet House is bustling with excitement as we prepare for the most plentiful and diverse lineup of programs in our 22 year history. For those who desire a more quiet and self-paced experience, we offer private retreats and spiritual direction opportunities.

Boundless Compassion is a program founded by Sr. Joyce Rupp, OSM. In 2022 Benet House became the headquarters for Boundless Compassion, and will host a Self-Compassion Retreat in May and a 4-Day Retreat and Facilitator Training in October.

Upcoming May programs at Benet House include a day of quiet and prayer and a gathering for spiritual directors. June retreats include a Deacon's Wives retreat and a Benet House first ever Summer Camp: Growing in Compassion for kindergarten to 5th graders.

August will bring a 5-day Guided Retreat based on reflections by Ronald Rohlheiser. Our Fall programs begin with The Enneagram and the Four Seeds of Compassion, followed by our popular Benedictine Journey Series with a focus on peace and justice. Many retreats are offered virtual as well as onsite.



Sr. Bobbi Bussan, Director of Benet House since 2014

The more relaxed days of summer provide the perfect opportunity to schedule time at Benet House. Consider a private retreat with time for contemplative walks, or attend one of our virtual book clubs or retreats. For many of our onsite retreats, you can join the Sisters for prayer in the Chapel and share a meal together.

People of all faiths are welcome at Benet House! Visit our website at www.smmsisters.org/retreats to view the updated retreat calendar and sign up for the monthly Inner Room newsletter.



Sr. Judith Ann Croegaert in the St. Mary Monastery Chapel, 2023

Coming Home

Sr. Judith Ann Croegaert grew up on a farm in Hooppole, Illinois, where her parents gave Judith Ann, her sister and brother a rich Catholic heritage filled with prayer, love for family and fun.

The Croegaert family attended St. Mary's Church in Hooppole where Judith Ann first met the Benedictine Sisters who came from Atkinson to teach catechism each summer. "I was sure Sr. Mary Alice Meersman was sent straight from heaven to love and teach me, and I wanted to be a Sister just like her," remembers Sr. Judith Ann.

When Judith Ann was in the 6th grade, the Croegaert family moved to Atkinson, IL. She attended St. Anthony parish and school, and already knew she wanted to be a teacher.

In spite of financial challenges, the Croegaert family found a way to send Judith Ann and her sister to St. Mary's Academy (SMA) for high school. With encouragement and prayers from her family, church and the Benedictine Sisters, Judith Ann arrived at SMA in 1958 along with several other friends from her hometown.

Meeting students from other areas of the U.S. and Mexico broadened Judith Ann's life experience, and she began to appreciate her family in new ways.

"I learned how to live in community at SMA. When you live, eat, sleep and play together, you get to know each other well," shared Sr. Judith Ann.

Following graduation, Judith Ann entered the St. Mary Monastery community. She made her first profession of vows on June 17, 1964 and her final profession of vows on March 21, 1971.

Sr. Judith Ann received a bachelor's degree in education from St. Ambrose University, Davenport, IA and a master's degree in early childhood education from the University of Illinois, Champaign, along with administrative hours at Illinois State University.

Mission Days

A longtime educator in Illinois, Sr. Judith Ann taught in Chicago from 1965-1967, and in Wenona, Moline, Nauvoo and Peoria between 1967 and 1984. She served as principal of the South Side Catholic

Community School in Peoria from 1984 to 1999, and as the librarian at Seton Catholic School in Moline from 1999 to 2002, when she was named pastoral associate at St. Ann Parish in Peoria.

Sr. Judith Ann added, “My days on mission were a joy. I love children, and being part of their education was a pure gift, and enriched my life so very much.”

Living on mission with other teachers helped Sr. Judith Ann grow as a Benedictine, teacher and pastoral associate. As a member of the Roncalli Society, she grew in the understanding that every member of the Church is equal and loved by God.

Serving the wider Peoria community, Sr. Judith Ann volunteered at Bishop O’Rourke’s Renaissance Hospitality House, served on the Catholic Social Services Parent Child Assistance Program (PCAP) Board and the Southside Manor Board. She was also an instructor for the Diocesan Protecting God’s Children program.

Peace and social justice activities were evident at St. Ann parish as well as religious growth. Sr. Judith Ann recalled being part of a group that traveled to an area of violence where there had been a fatal shooting. “We carried incense and a cross as we prayed to reclaim that space for Christ and peace,” Sr. Judith Ann reflected.

She is especially proud of her outreach work in the south side of Peoria with parishioners, school families and the neighborhood.

Coming Home

While living in Peoria for almost 40 years, Sr. Judith Ann visited regularly, but never really lived at the monastery.



Sr. Judith Ann in the Heritage room at St. Mary Monastery

After retiring from St. Ann Parish in 2020, Sr. Judith Ann remained in Peoria as a companion to her housemate, Sr. Rachel Bergschneider, during the pandemic. In the Fall of 2022, Sr. Judith Ann welcomed a new season of living at the monastery in Rock Island. Reflecting on her life at the monastery, she shared: “This community has supported me with wonderful ministry opportunities, and now it’s my turn to serve. I’m enjoying being here, and it’s good to be home.”



Sr. Marlene and Sr. Judith Ann relaxing in the Community Room



Prioress Susan Hutchens (center) honors Sr. Marlene Miller (left) and Sr. Janet Cassidy (right) in front of the Memorial Wall

Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB, and Sr. Janet Cassidy, OSB, Celebrate 60th Jubilee

Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB, and Sr. Janet Cassidy, OSB, celebrated their 60th Jubilees at St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island during Vespers on March 25, 2023.

Sr. Susan Hutchens acknowledged their combined 120 years of lives dedicated to God, to the community and to the service of others. Through their ministry, they have touched the lives of countless children and young women.

Sr. Marlene, Sr. Janet, and Sr. Phyllis McMurray entered the St. Mary Monastery community in 1961. The three Postulants quickly became friends and made a lasting impact for Catholic education during their lifetimes. Sr. Phyllis was principal at St. Mary's Academy (SMA) in Nauvoo from 1973 to 1997 and served as Prioress of the St. Mary Monastery community from 2004 to 2012. She died in 2013.

Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB

Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB, was born in Decatur, Illinois, the second of four children of Frank and Margaret (Arnold) Miller. She was baptized at

St. James Church in Decatur, and attended school in Greenview, IL, and 10th – 12th grades at SMA in Nauvoo, IL.

Sr. Marlene made her final profession on June 15, 1968. She received a B.A. in Education from St. Ambrose College, Davenport, Iowa and a M.Ed. as a reading specialist from University of Illinois.

An educator in Illinois for four decades, Sr. Marlene served at St. Boniface, Peoria, Holy Family, Peoria, St. Anthony's, Atkinson, Holy Trinity Bloomington, and St. Peter and Paul, Nauvoo.

At SMA, Sr. Marlene served as Dean of Women for 21 years, and was a member of the Nauvoo City Council for 14 years. When the community relocated to Rock Island, she served as Subprioress and House Coordinator from 2004 – 2012 and House Coordinator from 2012 – 2020. Currently Sr. Marlene serves as Volunteer Coordinator and Department Liaison. Sr. Marlene reflected, "I've loved all my missions – the students and their parents, the principals, co-workers, pastors and parishioners have been a tremendous blessing to my life."

Sr. Janet Cassidy, OSB

The daughter of James and Dorothy (Darling) Cassidy, Sr. Janet Cassidy, OSB, is the second oldest of six children. Born and raised in Peoria, IL, she received a rich Irish Catholic heritage in a home filled with love and faith.

In Peoria, Sr. Janet attended St. Bernard School, and graduated from SMA in 1961. After entering the St. Mary Monastery community in 1961, Sr. Janet also made her final profession on June 15, 1968. Sr. Janet earned a B.A. in Elementary Education from St. Ambrose College in Davenport, IA.

In 2023, Sr. Janet marks 58 years teaching Catholic education in Illinois and Indiana. She taught at St. Anthony School in Atkinson, followed by Sts. Peter and Paul School in Nauvoo, St. Thomas More School in Munster, Indiana, and Holy Family School in Peoria. She taught at Seton Catholic School from 1982 until she retired in 2016, but returned part-time as a volunteer to provide help in math for students in kindergarten, first, second and third grade.

After the 60th Jubilee ceremony, Sr. Janet added: "I am eternally grateful to my parents for helping me attend St. Mary's Academy where I was introduced to this Benedictine community. I am thankful the community accepted me as a member, and it's been an incredible journey. I have been greatly blessed!"

Following the 60th Jubilee ceremony, the Sisters enjoyed a special celebration dinner with their community.

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

LUKE 8:15



Postulants Marlene Miller (left), Janet Cassidy (center), and Phyllis McMurray (right) February 25, 1962



Sr. Marlene Miller and Sr. Janet Cassidy sing the Suscipe during their Jubilee ceremony



Care of Creation team members: (Clockwise from left) Sr. Mary Schmidt, Julie Plummer, Linda Clewell, Lori Carroll, Sr. Sandra Brunenn, and Sr. Marianne Burkhard

Meet our Creation Care Team

By Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB

Each of the members of our community Creation Care Team brings a unique perspective that adds to the richness and the wisdom of the whole group. We are eager to introduce you to the team!

Sister Mary Schmidt grew up on a farm near Bradford, IL. From the beginning she developed awareness of the importance of good crops and the need to care for the farm animals. The large family depended on their garden for food: enough potatoes to last through the winter and tomatoes, corn, and other fruits and vegetables that were home-grown and lovingly canned. She has always had an eye for the beauty of the earth especially in the flowers, fruit trees and gardens. More recently Sister has grown in awareness of the importance of trees for the health of our planet. You might say she is our ‘resident gardener.’

Linda Clewell also remembers growing up with flower beds and a vegetable garden in her backyard. Sunday afternoons were often spent riding through the countryside stopping at historical markers and in

the summertime the family enjoyed camping in nearby State Parks. Linda enjoys her own garden and is a volunteer with Master Gardeners. Her commitment to care for Earth has been strengthened through book study including *The Universe Story* by Brian Swimme and *The Universal Christ* by Richard Rohr. Both place emphasis on the Oneness of creation.

Julie Plummer remembers at a young age, camping in the summer with her family; however, she says “it was when my husband and I sailed our 27 ft. sailboat AngelSea II through the South Pacific for three years that I became keenly aware of the extreme beauty of creation and my personal responsibility to treat the earth well with my actions.” Julie is a biologist focused on sustainability, environmental science, and for the past 23 years on solid waste! She works with Iowa Waste Exchange. Julie is a great resource for the monastery with her knowledge of sustainability, and she is helping us build connections with the wider community.

Sister Marianne Burkhard grew up on the shore of Lake Zurich in Switzerland. She says “Nature was like a home and teacher to me.” She was always intrigued with signs of changing weather and loved to sit on large stones watching the sunset. She saw it, even then, as God’s creation. Marianne says she has always been concerned with the warming climate, and now her main concern is to protect our natural environment.

Lori Carroll says that she has been a ‘nature lover’ as long as she can remember. She grew up in the 60’s and remembers well how impressed she was by ads at that time promoting anti-littering campaigns. One of which portrayed a Native American man in his canoe surrounded by a lake filled with garbage as a tear ran down his face. She is deeply concerned with the lack of awareness and indifference about our care for creation that seems to still be widespread in our culture.

Sister Sandra Brunenn is a city girl but her early love for nature was strongly influenced by her parents who both grew up in the country and loved the outdoors. Her fondest childhood memories include fishing, mushroom hunting, and visits to her grandparents’ farm. She has been an avid reader of writers on Creation Spirituality since the 1970s. She is enthusiastic about helping the Laudato Si’ Action Platform (www.laudatosiplatform.org) become more widely known.

As these women reflect on their relationship with creation, they all stress their awareness of its holiness and our need to be responsible caretakers. And they are all interested in living and promoting more sustainable lifestyles.

The Team continues to develop plans and programs to strengthen our commitment to our care for Earth. Most immediately, we will again host an

outdoor public prayer service during the Season of Creation in the fall. And, in collaboration with Benet House Retreat Center, we are planning an overnight retreat Sept 8—9 called Starry Night, Wondrous Day, that will focus on ecospirituality and sustainability practices. We hope to include a Friday evening sky viewing guided by The Popular Astronomy Club. We trust that our efforts are bearing fruit with the Sisters and in our extended community of Oblates, alums, and friends.

Bob Essary was the first employee hired at St. Mary Monastery in Rock Island, and is an adjunct member of the Creation Care team. As maintenance and physical plant engineer, Bob helped turn on the first pump of the geothermal system in 2001, and more recently oversaw the installation of solar panels on the monastery grounds. We are so grateful for his attentive daily care of our buildings and grounds.



Bob Essary, Maintenance and Physical Plant Engineer



Sr. Margaret T. Murphy, OSB 1936-2023

Sr. Margaret Murphy, OSB, died March 6, 2023 at the monastery.

Margaret was born in Carthage, Illinois, a daughter of Miles and Rose Murphy. She attended Young America School, Carthage, IL and graduated from St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo, IL, like her mother and four sisters before her. She received her B.A. from St. Ambrose University, Davenport, IA and her M.A. from University of Illinois. She earned a certificate in Theology from St. Norbert's College, WI and a certificate in Spiritual Direction from Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, MO.

Sr. Margaret entered the Benedictine Community on September 1, 1954. She made her first profession as a Benedictine Sister on August 25, 1956. Sr. Margaret's ministry included many years teaching early education at Catholic Grade Schools in Nauvoo, Monmouth, Peoria, Moline, Peoria Heights and Bloomington, IL.

In Peoria, Sr. Margaret taught and was Director of Neighborhood House from 1993-1995, and served on the Rock Island County Interracial Council. She was a board member for the Rock Island County Emergency Welfare Information and Referral Agency, and also taught ELS to adults. Sr. Margaret served as a Parish Religious Education Coordinator and on the Diocesan Sisters Conference. More recently she served in community ministry, offered Spiritual Direction and taught *Lectio Divina* at Benet House Retreat Center.

Sr. Margaret is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; her sister-in-law Jeania Murphy; nieces and nephews.

Sr. Margaret T. Murphy, OSB
1936-2023

In Memoriam . . .

St. Mary's Academy Alumnae

Irene Mitchell, '69, died January 28, 2023

Sheryl Wells Sullivan, '76, died April 1, 2023

Jane Amann Wolgemuth, '65, died April 18, 2023

Friends

Debra Appelquist, sister of Bob Essary head of maintenance at St. Mary Monastery, died January 19, 2023.

Robert Cauwels, husband of Mary Ellen Windy Cauwels '56, died September 25, 2022.

Sheila Gurnett Warner, former Sister Sean of St. Mary Monastery, died August 30, 2022.

Jim McNamara, husband of Oblate Sharon, died February 24, 2023.

Mila Smith, former Welcome Area volunteer, died February 8, 2023.

Clarys Souter, sister of Sisters Catherine and Audrey Cleary (+2018) of St. Mary Monastery, died January 29, 2023.

John "J" VanDyke, Architect of St. Mary Monastery in Rock Island, IL and friend of the community, died January 24, 2023.

St. Mary Monastery's Canonical Visitation



The St. Mary Monastery Sisters welcomed a three-member visitation team as part of their canonical visitation by the Congregation of Saint Benedict. From left to right the team included: Sr. Jennifer Horner, former prioress of Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, IN; Sr. Nancy Bauer, President of the Monastic Congregation of Saint Benedict; and Sr. Nicole Kunze, prioress of Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, ND. Pictured with them is Sr. Susan Hutchens, prioress of St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island, IL.





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Jan Gull, Editor

Oblate Day 2023

October 15th

Oblates are invited to Mass and Luncheon

Begin a year of celebration of the 150th Anniversary
of the founding of the Sisters of St. Benedict,
St. Mary Monastery in 1874.

Formal invitation coming soon.



Sisters of St. Benedict
St. Mary Monastery
ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS

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