

Celebrating 150 Years



Connecting
Point



Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

“Behold I make all things new” - EVERY DAY!

Rev 21: 5

As I begin this letter, I am surrounded outdoors by mountains (well almost) of snow piled outside my windows from the recent ploughing of our driveways. They rose from the nearly 15” of snow that fell this week. In the brilliant sunshine, without a doubt it is gorgeous! Of course, it is easy to say that from this side of my windows! The negative temperatures (at present -8°, not counting the windchill factors!) say something quite different.

We have just turned the page on 2023. January 2024 presents a blank slate. A new year – a new beginning – what will it hold for us? Everyone asks that question as the year starts anew. On the global scale will it mean an end to war in our world? A peaceful campaign process? An economy that benefits all? Or on a more personal level, might it mean a new marriage, a new baby, hobby, home? A change of occupation? An improved self-image? An acceptance of a situation we cannot change? A closer relationship with family, friends, or God?

Every day signals a new opportunity – not just the beginning of the new year. Each day is a new beginning: of joys, sorrows, births, passings, surprises, disappointments, expectations fulfilled or depleted.

Not one of us can bring about any one of these things on our own. We need one another to bring newness or change at any level. One thing is certain though, that with others, we are able to do many things we cannot do by ourselves.

As Benedictine Sisters who strive to practice hospitality, we have learned the importance of welcoming others into our lives as we welcome each day with all it brings. Our volunteers and employees are those whom we regularly welcome to assist us with our work, the management of our home, and our care for one another. We are grateful for their service, and for their contributions to our lives.

Welcoming whatever the new year holds for us will determine at least partially, the outcome. Receiving all things with open arms enables us to move forward. It is easier to maintain balance when our arms are extended outward than when they are held tight at our sides. Reaching forward is always easier than reaching backward.

As we – and you - ponder what the new year will hold: whether joy or sorrow, peace or controversy, exciting times or difficult ones, let us remember to always welcome the new with open arms. Every moment is a new gift! As you wake up each day, ask yourself: “what newness will this day bring to me?” Then make a promise to welcome it!

We hold you in our prayers,

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

Cover: Sisters of St. Benedict photo taken in front of Chapel Memorial Wall on October 15, 2023.

Front row: Srs. Catherine Cleary, Mary Schmidt, Susan Hutchens, Marilyn Roman, Paula Helenthal

Back row: Srs. Rachel Bergschneider, Ruth Ksycki, Marianne Burkhard, Bobbi Bussan, Sheila McGrath, Judith Ann Croegaert, Sandra Brunenn, Janet Cassidy, Marlene Miller, Jackie Walsh, Stefanie MacDonald

As We Celebrate Our 150th Year...

Sr. Rachel Bergschneider, OSB, reflects on her years in community and ministry.

What have your ministries been?

My ministries have been: teaching first grade at Immaculate Conception in Monmouth, IL; teaching Religion and French at St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo, IL., in addition to being a Resident Advisor; serving as Campus Minister at Bradley University in Peoria, IL; serving at St. Thomas the Apostle Church in Peoria Heights where I was responsible for adult formation and parish programs in Family Life, social justice, and liturgy; and teaching prisoners and the ex-incarcerated to prepare them for employment.

Tell us about your early years in community.



Sr. Rachel, 1969

When I entered the community, life took shape in a well-ordered pattern of prayer and work in an atmosphere of silence.

As I moved into ministry, the daily pattern changed. Morning and evening prayer structured the day while engagement with those to whom we ministered filled much of our time. Gathering for evening meals was an important community time.

How did community change with Vatican II?

The seismic event of Vatican II called our community to a deepened understanding not only of ourselves but the world around us. We implemented changes — from the exterior (change of habit, ministries) to a more interior commitment to prayer. Our work broadened from the classroom to other ministries, sometimes at greater distances — reflecting our understanding and commitment to serve the needs of the People of God in many circumstances.



Sr. Rachel Bergschneider, OSB

What has not changed?

The Rule of St. Benedict is the bedrock and foundation of who our community was and still is today. The rhythm of prayer and community gatherings is the cement which binds us together.

Looking to the future, what do you look forward to?

I hope our community stays grounded in the vision of St. Benedict who directs us to hospitality and care for the needy and forgotten. With the Gospel as our guide - as Benedict reminds us — may we look outward to the cry of the poor.

What are you grateful for?

I am grateful for the unconditional love of God that guides my daily life. I am thankful for the prayerful discernment of this community over the last 150 years that has equipped us to see God's call to serve in so many ways. Most importantly, I cherish the bedrock of prayer and community that has sustained me and so many others for 150 years.



St. Mary's Academy Building, circa 1940's

The Journey of Faith Expands!

By Jan Gull, St. Mary Monastery Oblate

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Sisters of St. Benedict.

As we honor the community of St. Mary Monastery, the Sisters acknowledge God's guidance and provision through their 150-year journey.

The Founding

The first Benedictine women to settle in America arrived at St. Marys, Pennsylvania, in 1852 from Eichstätt, Bavaria. They answered a call for help to educate immigrant children. As this community grew, they established new monastery locations, including Erie, PA which founded St. Scholastica Convent in Chicago, IL.

In 1874, at the request of the pastor in Nauvoo, IL, St. Scholastica Convent sent Sr. Ottilia Hoeveler and four other Sisters to Nauvoo to establish a school for girls that would later become St. Mary's Academy (SMA).

Education Ministry

The Sisters served in a total of 26 schools, nine parish ministries, eight colleges/universities and seven Newman Centers.

Below are highlights of a few Sisters who either served or are serving in education ministries.



Sr. Janet Cassidy graduated from SMA then entered community and made her final profession in 1968. She has taught in Catholic schools for 58 years and is currently a math interventionist for Seton Catholic School in Moline, IL.



Sr. Madeleine Henkel († 1981) was a musician who taught at Alleman Catholic High School in Rock Island, IL, then moved to the inner city of Chicago, IL to teach in Lawndale and Edgewood.



Sr. Phyllis McMurray († 2013) taught math at SMA then became head of SMA in 1975 until it closed in 1997. Her love of SMA and all of its students could not be surpassed. Sr. Phyllis also served as Prioress from 2004 – 2012.



Sr. Mary Osborn († 1997) graduated from SMA and for 27 years she served as librarian, senior moderator, resident assistant in the dorm, head of yearbook and taught commercial business at SMA.



Sr. Rosemary Murphy († 2020) was a teacher for 37 years. In Nauvoo she served as teacher and Dean of Students at SMA and St. Mary's Grade School, and as Principal at Sts. Peter & Paul Grade School. Sr. Rosemary also taught at Bergan High School in Peoria, IL.



Sr. Stefanie MacDonald made her final profession in 2013 and her current ministry includes teaching Preschool at Our Lady of Grace Academy in East Moline, IL. Prior to entering community, Sr. Stefanie taught Kindergarten and Preschool, and assisted with Special Needs retreats at the Archdiocese of Dubuque.



Sr. Sheila McGrath served as sub-prioress for 20 years with three different prioresses. After completing education to become a hospital chaplain, she served as a chaplain for 12 years at Quad Cities hospitals. Before these ministries, Sr.

Sheila taught grade school in Chicago, Clinton, Ivesdale and Nauvoo, IL. At SMA she taught home economics and was resident assistant in the dorm. Sr. Sheila also taught at Bergan High School in Peoria, IL.



Sr. Michelle Rheinlander († 2015) was a teacher at SMA and many other grade schools, and served as Superintendent of Schools for the Catholic Diocese of Peoria, IL. She then received her RN-BSN and served as a civil service public health nurse in Arizona, New

Mexico and on Navajo reservations.



Sr. Barbara Vaughan († 2008) taught for 30 years in IL and IN in grade schools and at SMA. Then she taught at Booker T. Washington Junior College in Birmingham, AL for 10 years. Sr. Barbara devoted her ministry to serving the poor and improving the education of children in the South.

For 150 years, the Sisters of St. Benedict have shared their Benedictine values with those they served.

Expanded Ministries

After Vatican II, the Sisters broadened their ministries to include social justice, serving as hospital chaplains and taking on new roles in parish ministries. Below are a few Sisters who served in these expanded ministries.



Sr. Catherine Cleary served two terms as Prioress, then worked as a family therapist at Lutheran Family Service. In Rock Island, she was the Director of Benet House Retreat Center and also served as spiritual director. Sr. Catherine taught at Alleman High School in Rock Island, IL and ministered at the University of Illinois

Urbana-Champaign, IL Newman Center. She also served as Pastoral Associate at St. Thomas Parish and St. Mark's Parish in Peoria, IL.



Pope Francis greets Oblate Lori Carroll at the Vatican, Rome

International Oblate Congress

By Lori Carroll, St. Mary Monastery Oblate

I arrived at the College of Sant'Anselmo in Rome, Italy last fall to attend the Fifth World Congress of Benedictine Oblates. My heart was filled with anticipation at the start of this incredible opportunity.

In total over 150 oblates were attending the conference from 35 countries. Our daily schedule included breakfast followed by Lauds, and a keynote speaker. After an evening meal, we attended Vespers in the Abbey church which was founded in 1893.

There were three keynote speakers: Soeur Marie Madeleine Caseau, Prioress of Sainte Bathilde in France; Father Donnato Ogliari, Abbott of Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls Abbey in Rome, and Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, Abbot of Sant'Anselmo, from Conception Abbey in Missouri. Translation for all sessions was available in English, Italian, German, French and Spanish.

Soeur Caseau shared the importance of Oblate formation needs and Fr. Ogliari spoke on ways Oblates can live out their calling in the 21st century.

Although we Oblates do not have as much time for devoted prayer as monastics living in a monastery, we still need to live in communion with God and carve out time for prayer.

Because Oblates are often the first to greet guests to the monastery, Abbot Polan encouraged us to offer guests two gifts: reconciliation by listening without judgment, and prayer.

We celebrated Mass after each keynote speaker. At each Liturgy of the Hours all music was chanted in Latin, but at Mass they varied the languages. As a musician, I was captivated by the Latin chant.

There were smaller group workshops on some days. My group was led by Janis Dopp, the Oblate Director at St. Meinrad Abbey in Indiana until her recent death. Her workshop taught the significance of having a written history of our Oblates to go along with the history of the Sisters.

One evening after Vespers we enjoyed a lovely

**Let nothing be preferred to the
work of God.**

RB 43.3

concert presented by two singers and five instrumentalists singing and playing Renaissance music on period instruments.

We took three field trips during the conference. The first field trip was to Sacro Speco in Subiaco, where St. Benedict's first monastery was established. It was built around the original cave he lived in when St. Benedict grew tired of the sinfulness of Roman society.

Our destination for the second field trip was to Montecassino Abbey. Founded in 529, the Abbey was the last monastery that St. Benedict established himself. Built on top of a mountain in the town of Casinum, the views of the surrounding countryside are stunning.

The third field trip was to the Vatican. On the day of the excursion, we received confirmation that each Oblate would be able to meet the Holy Father.

Pope Francis had a gentle smile and commanding peace that put me at ease as I approached him. As the Pope took my hand, I greeted him with "Grazie per Laudato Si" (thank you for Laudato Si). The day was an amazing experience and a highpoint from the conference.

I am thankful for the opportunity to attend the Oblate Congress, and to represent the St. Mary Monastery Sisters and Oblates. Attending the Oblate conference reinforced my dedication to the Benedictine way of life.



Sacro Speco in Subiaco



Statue commemorating St. Benedict's death, in the courtyard at Montecassino Abbey



St. Mary Monastery and St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo, IL

St. Mary's Academy All Class Reunion: July 12-14, 2024

**Celebrating the 150th Anniversary
of our Founding**

Do you remember?

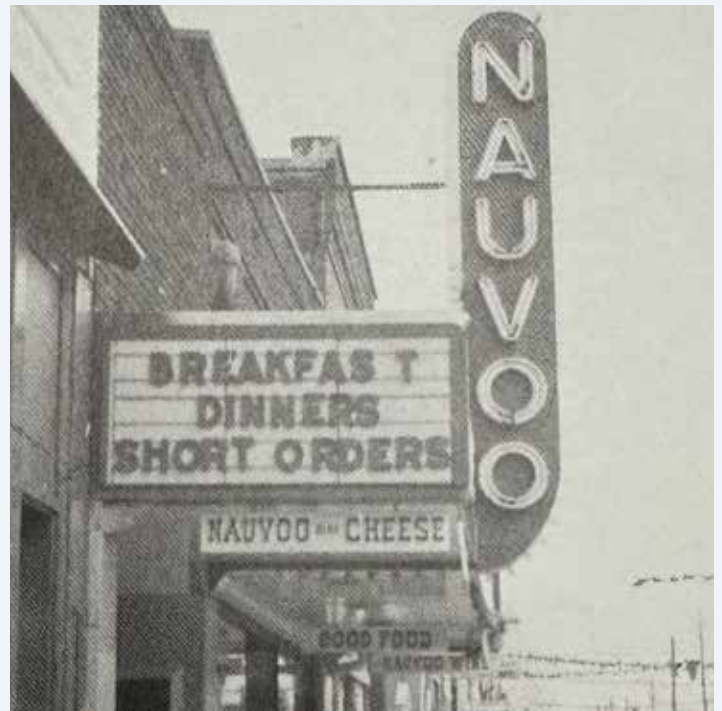
... Room check, Kraus 'foods', ice cream sodas and cherry cokes, Saturday morning donuts and going to the movies, basketball, Wednesday night picnics in the park!

Since St. Scholastica's Academy (later St. Mary's Academy) opened on all Souls' Day in 1874, several thousand alumnae and their families have benefitted from the teaching and influence of the Benedictine sisters and from the camaraderie of fellow classmates.

In July, the Sisters of St. Benedict, as part of their 150th Anniversary celebration, will host a St. Mary's Academy Reunion. All graduates and former attendees of St. Mary's Academy are invited to attend. Come gather with friends and the sisters on Friday, July 12th through Sunday, July 14th.

Enjoy the beauty of St. Mary Monastery and its grounds while connecting with friends and classmates. Activities are planned throughout the weekend as well as time for visiting. On Sunday, July 14th there will be a Eucharistic Liturgy followed by a special meal.

You don't want to miss this significant event! Be sure to register so that we can have a great reunion with the outstanding women who have carried on the traditions of the Sisters. **To register, go to:**
<https://www.smmsisters.org/150>



Kraus's Caf e

Former Sisters Gathering April 26-28, 2024

The Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Mary Monastery community will always be grateful for the contribution and life you shared with us as a former Sister. Whether you were with us for a short time or a longer one, you were part of us then, and are still a part of us now. As we celebrate our Benedictine life over the past 150 years, **we invite you** to join us for a “Celebration of Life and Memories” gathering on April 26-28, 2024 in Rock Island, IL.

In 1874, five valiant women from St. Scholastica Convent in Chicago, IL made their way to Nauvoo, IL. Ultimately, they made a new foundation in Nauvoo. Many others joined the Sisters at St. Mary Monastery, some staying for a short period of time, others for many years, and others for a life-time commitment. Each one left a gift of themselves amidst the community. We were brought together by God and have been gifted with each other. The Benedictine values of prayer, hospitality, and community have been and continue to be a source of strength and encouragement to all of us, and those with whom we share our lives.

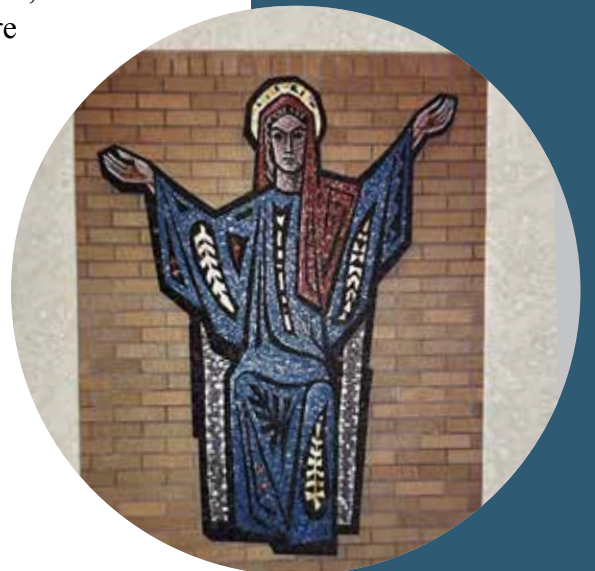
Whatever vocation in life we have chosen, our current times hold their own unique challenges and opportunities. Only God can know the future, but like our five Sisters who pioneered this Benedictine community we go forward, reassured that God is with us.

We invite you to the former Sisters gathering at St. Mary Monastery from the evening of Friday, April 26th to Sunday noon, April 28th. Lunch and dinner will be provided on Saturday, and brunch on Sunday following Mass. There will be opportunities to gather with one another and the Sisters at the Monastery, time for conversation and leisure, tours of the current monastery building and grounds, and a brief video of the community’s history. Hopefully you will also enjoy time to share memories, joys, laughter, and maybe even tears, as you re-connect with others, whether they were your teachers, or your students, or most importantly, your friends.

By now you will have received a registration form in the mail. Please return the form to Sr. Bobbi Bussan at St. Mary Monastery. For questions regarding housing, please call Sr. Jackie Walsh at (309) 283-2108.

May the Love of God and the
Peace of Benedict be yours,

Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress





Members from St. Mary's Academy Class of 1965 enjoyed visiting at Starved Rock State Park, IL

Front Row: Sr. Marlene Miller '61, Sr. Judith Ann Croegaert '62, Linda Sullivan Owens, Marie McHarry, Ruth Ann Lewis, Andrea Abrams Corbett, Barbara Glueckert Bryzgalski, Paulette Hansen Fisher

Back Row: Mary Croegaert Buysse, Shirley Pecharich McElvain, Carol Cruse Maloney

Members from St. Mary's Academy Class of 1973 gathered for their 50th High School Reunion at St. Mary Monastery

Pictured: Elizabeth Startz Stec, Jane Heinzmann Genzel, Linda McEntee Fasching, Toni Lenix Turner, Cortney Daniels, Ellen Wangler Staples, Mary Beth McKinney, Valerie Greer Weeks, Maggie Foresman Kindig, Cindy Gera Howard

St. Mary's Academy Class of 1975 (Debbie Castrey) and Class of 1976 (Pam Luth Hansen) joined the reunion on Saturday.



St. Mary's Academy Class of 1974 50th Class Reunion

June 28 – June 30, 2024

For details and to help us find fellow classmates, please contact Lorelei Hammers at hammersfam8@gmail.com.

In Memoriam . . .

St. Mary's Academy Alumnae

Sylvia Montavon, '58, died November 3, 2023.

Irma Jean Cook Spaeth, former Sister Damien, '50, died October 19, 2023.

Kathy McGrath Ludolph Larosche, '63, sister of Sister Sheila McGrath and aunt of Debby Dwyer Giese, '76, died December 8, 2023.

Oblates

Ann Knapp, Oblate, died October 14, 2023.

Friends

Weldon Beckner, father of Oblate Jan Gull, died January 4, 2024.

Maralyn Bray, mother of Oblate Maureen Moshage, died October 15, 2023.

Sharon Domyancich, sister of Oblate and volunteer Linda Clewell, died December 27, 2023.

Georgerine Eckert, former CNA at St. Mary Monastery, died October 3, 2023.

Father Duane Jack, regular celebrant of the Eucharistic liturgy at the Monastery died December 29, 2023.

Colleen Naborowski, sister of Oblate Carolyn Gray, died October 5, 2023.

Jude O'Donnell, son of Maryann Baer O'Donnell, '48 and nephew of Sister Cecile Baer († 2021), died August 5, 2023.

James Peitzmeier, brother of Sister Ruth Ksycki's sister-in-law, Patricia, died November 2, 2023.

Tom Peterson, husband of Joanie Doyle Peterson, '68, died October 11, 2023.

Joanne Seale, sister-in-law of Sister Phyllis McMurray, died August 5, 2023.

John Stolfa, brother of Oblate Chris Kraft, died July 17, 2023.

Marilyn Suerth, sister-in-law of Sister Margaret Suerth († 2021), died August 22, 2023.

Lee Svenson, husband of Marguerite Miller, '63, and brother-in-law of Sr. Marlene Miller, '61, died January 16, 2024.

Perron Thurston, son of Rosalind Moore Thurston, '61, died August 14, 2023.

Ron Wilken, husband of Oblate Toni Wilken, died September 28, 2023.

Anna Marie Busch Wyman, former Sister Marie, died May 27, 2023.

A correction noted in the Fall 2023 issue: Claudia Cox died on May 16, 2023, not on May 22, 2023.





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Jan Gull, Editor



The Woman at the Well Retreat

Fri. March 1 (4:30 pm) – Sun. March 3 (1:00 pm)

\$290 (single); \$275 (dbl); \$220 (commuter)

To register: retreats@smmsisters.org or
www.smmsisters.org/retreats

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