



Embracing Winter Contrasts



**Connecting
Point**

Embracing Winter Contrasts



Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

Perhaps more than any other season, Winter is a time of contrasts. The light fades early to darkness. The days can be filled with sun yet with temperatures below freezing. The brilliant red of poinsettias in front of the chapel windows, with the starkness of barren trees on the outside lets us know the versatility and variety of nature around us.

The prophet Isaiah says it best during the Advent readings leading up to the birth of Christ at Christmas: “The wolf will be a guest of the lamb; the cow and the bear shall be neighbors; the child will lay a hand on the snake.” These are contrasts that astound us or maybe just seem like nonsense. Yet his passage concludes with the most astonishing statement of all: “There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain.” (cf. Is. 11:6-9) No ruin, God promises, because all shall know God – as protector, as giver of life, as one who loves each and every bit of creation. Nothing on this planet, in this world that we know, or the universe that we do not know, is left out or forgotten by the love of God.

God’s love reconciles all contrasts, not to eliminate them, but to envelop them into a world and a heart that contains ALL – each with its own beauty and life. That is the world created by God, broken open by Christ Jesus, and blessed continually by the Spirit. That is the world we are all called to embrace – with its beauty and ugliness, with its darkness and light, with its peace and war.

Those of us who live, and enjoy living, in the Midwest, know well that winter can be harsh, but always bears the promise of Springtime. That hope is what we too must bear in our hearts, because God has assured us there will be no harm or ruin when we all dwell together as one. We each have a role in bringing that about.

Let us welcome contrasts with the heart of true hospitality, no matter where we find them or they find us, each day of the coming year.

We hold you all in our prayers.

Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress



Sr. Stefanie MacDonald elected to the Council of the Monastic Congregation of Saint Benedict

Beginning Again

By Sr. Stefanie MacDonald, OSB,

I recently traveled to Saint Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, MN to attend the chapter meeting of the Monastic Congregation of Saint Benedict, formerly the Federation of Saint Benedict. Our congregation includes Benedictine women's monasteries located in the United States, Japan, Taiwan, the Bahamas and Puerto Rico.

Gathering with delegates from other member monasteries provides a way for me to learn and share perspectives on current and future monastic life with my peers. During the chapter meetings, Sr. Nancy Bauer from Saint Benedict's Monastery, MN was installed as the new Congregation president, and I was elected to the Council.

Serving in religious life today includes feelings of both joy and sadness. I cherish sharing life and praying daily with my Sisters, and modeling the Benedictine charism with my students. I also carry sadness because so many Sisters who mentored me are now in heaven. Ministry can sometimes feel lonely as we face an exciting yet unknown future.

This year I began my 25th year of teaching, and I love the 'beginning again' that comes in the class-

room. I delight in discovering new ways to teach my students and the process of starting a new academic year with a clean slate. Beginning again can also be applied to religious life, and it is important to bring both clarity and confidence to this process: clarity to focus on the most important things, and confidence to move beyond fear into action.

Casting a new vision also requires a commitment to dream. I am grateful for my community who listens to my dreams, and shares their perspective for religious life in the future. The multi-generational dialogue provides energy to begin new chapters for the community of St. Mary Monastery and Benedictines around the world.

Pictured above: Sr. Nicole Kunze, Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, ND, Sr. Jacqueline Leiter, St. Paul's Monastery, St. Paul, MN, Sr. Michaela Hedican, Saint Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, MN, Sr. Stefanie MacDonald, St. Mary Monastery, Rock Island, IL, and Sr. Nancy Bauer, Saint Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, MN



Cathy Dolan, President, Calumet Brass Foundry, Dolton, IL

Leading a Legacy

By Cathy Dolan, SMA, Class of 1986

Going to St. Mary's Academy (SMA) boarding school in Nauvoo, IL was a pivotal time in my life. Grade school was a struggle to say the least, and my parents had concerns about sending me away to boarding school. It would be my grandmother who would pay for my first year. She graduated from University of Illinois in the early 1930's, and believed strongly in a good Catholic education.

At SMA I developed great friendships that I cherish to this day. Inside the classrooms at SMA I learned how to study. When a teacher saw a student struggling or falling behind, they reached out in kindness and spent their time on us generously. On the campus of St. Mary's Academy, I learned about selflessness and generosity - from the teachers to the Resident Assistants to the SMA Administration and all of the Sisters of St. Benedict. The teachers cared deeply for us, and gave of themselves for the betterment of the students. Without these amazing people, I never would have graduated with honors and become a member of the National Honor Society, which was my most significant accomplishment in high school.

After graduating from SMA, I floundered and couldn't find my groove in college. In 1992, I began working for my Dad at the family business, Calumet Brass Foundry, located in Dolton, IL. Before long I was working more than I was going to school, although I did earn my Associates degree in Liberal Arts.

My father, the entrepreneur, had started another profitable business and wanted nothing to do with a run-down foundry. The business needed some serious reinvesting and being young I believed I could see the pay out in my lifetime. On March 31, 1995, I signed the documents to purchase Calumet Brass Foundry.

Since that time, the company has experienced many changes - from updated technology to almost a million-dollar reinvestment in our air handling system. Throughout its 115-year history, the company has endured many changes. During my leadership of the company, we've faced many adversities including 9/11, the 2008 housing crash, the pandemic and now a labor shortage.

“On the campus of St. Mary’s Academy, I learned about selflessness and generosity.”

CATHY DOLAN

I am grateful to work alongside my husband. He is my best friend and I am blessed to have him as a partner in life and in business. Thank you, Peter, for doing all of the heavy lifting, so I can sit in the office, where it is cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

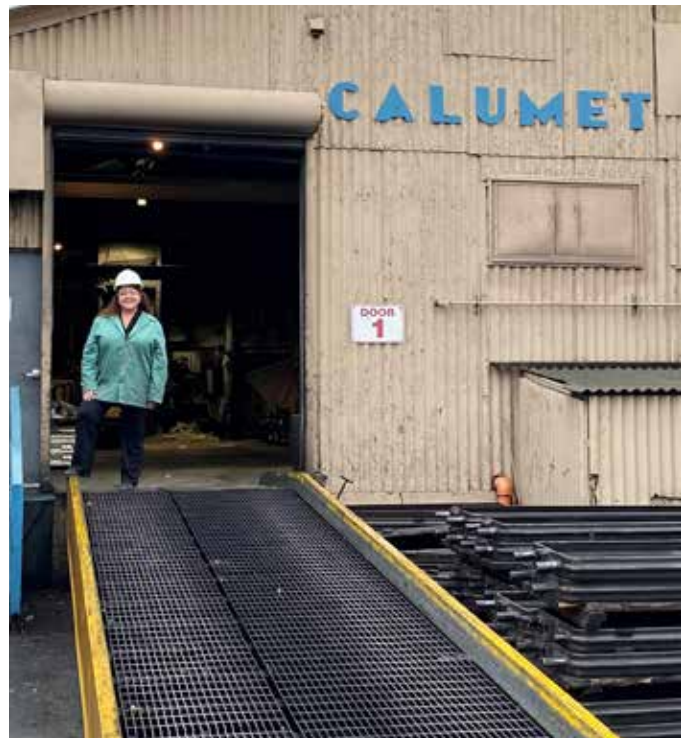
Our long-time employees are the backbone of Calumet Brass. Our children have worked with us on occasion and one of my daughters has expressed some interest in possibly learning the business. She would be the 5th generation of the Calumet Brass family. Pretty impressive for a 10-man shop operation in south Chicago.

My great grandfather bought an existing foundry in 1906 and sold it to my grandfather and so on through four generations. Fast forward 30 years, I am grateful that my education and friendships made during my years at St. Mary’s Academy have equipped me to face adversity in business with courage and innovation. I trust that I can look to the future with confidence. Thank you St. Mary’s Academy!

If you’d like to re-connect with Cathy Dolan, her contact information is: CD@calbrass.com.



Cathy Dolan, 1986



Cathy Dolan at Calumet Brass Foundry, 2023



*Bear Lake, Rocky Mountain National Park,
Colorado*

Caring for Our Common Home

By Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB

Have you read the LETTER? The letter I refer to is from Pope Francis and it is addressed to YOU and “every person living on this planet”! *Laudato Si’*, *On Care for Our Common Home*, an encyclical letter on God’s creation was sent to all of us in June 2015. Francis calls for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet (LS 14). At the core we are invited to see Earth with new eyes recognizing that all creation is a gift and that everything is interconnected, to hear “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”, and to respond with care, joy, and sobriety.

How have we responded? Our Sisters welcomed this letter enthusiastically recognizing that some of the core values it names are at the heart of our lived experience as Benedictines. The Rule of Benedict calls us to live with simplicity, reverence, and care for all the goods of creation. Indeed we are to care for all we touch “as sacred vessels of the altar” (RB 31:10). We hold all in common, seek to distinguish between ‘wants’ and ‘needs’, and share with those in need. These values guide us daily. For years they have included practices as simple as using cloth napkins, and as complex as adopting socially responsible investment policies. They have led us to seek alternative energy

sources including geo-thermal heating and cooling systems in our ‘new’ monastery and the recent addition of solar panels. We celebrate the gift of creation in our daily Liturgy of the Hours and recycle as much as possible. We are happy to share the beauty of our prayer and outdoor space with retreatants and guests at Benet House Retreat Center. Most recently we held an outdoor ecumenical prayer service celebrating the beauty of creation, toured our area recycling center, and learned about our local indigenous peoples.

The urgency of the message of the letter is more apparent with each passing day. Recognizing this, the Vatican and an international coalition of Catholic organizations have teamed together to develop the *Laudato Si’* Action Platform. The goal is to empower us all to take “decisive action, here and now” as we journey toward a better future together (LS161). The Platform names 7 Goals to guide people’s actions in working toward the realization of the hopes expressed in *Laudato Si’*. It is estimated that over 6000 units (including organizations, parishes and families) have joined the Platform so far. This includes our Benedictine community along with 650 other religious communities around the world. Leaders envision the numbers joining the Platform



*Sisters touring the Scott Area Recycling Center,
Davenport, IA*

growing sevenfold each year; then, in seven years, a critical mass of 3.5% of humanity might be actively engaged. We envision a massive attitude shift walking the path of renewal together.

What does our commitment to being a “Laudato Si’ Community” involve? We began by engaging in a reflection process noting how our community values harmonize with the values in Laudato Si’. Our community Creation Care Team then completed a self-assessment using a tool provided on the Platform website. We have noted areas where we have been proactive in our care of creation and also where we need to focus our energies. Now we are developing Goals and Action Plans for the coming year.

We encourage you to join the platform! You can check it out here: laudatosiactionplatform.org. The website includes specific suggestions for action by families and parishes.

Whether or not you have read the letter, do watch “The Letter: A Message For Our Earth”, a powerful 80 minute long new film available on YouTube. You will find it enlightening, challenging, and inspiring. And it may even prompt you to read THE LETTER, LAUDATO SI’...and act on it!



HELPFUL RESOURCES

www.YouTube.com

“The Letter: A Message For Our Earth”

www.laudatosimovement.org

www.laudatosiactionplatform.org

www.catholicclimatecovenant.org



St. Mary Monastery Oblate Day Attendees, 2022

Benedictine Hospitality in Everyday Life

Psalm 105:3 proclaims “Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice” and that’s exactly what the Oblates of St. Mary Monastery did when gathered on Oblate Day.

On a beautiful October day, the Sisters welcomed Oblates gathered for the annual event. The Oblate community had not been together in person for over two years and enjoyed re-connecting with each other and meeting people from other groups.

Familiar faces met new friends to receive a monastery update from Prioress Susan Hutchens and listen to panel speakers. Oblate Ann Lilius shared, “There was a sense of joy and jubilation at reuniting with each other.”

With the theme of hospitality, the program provided an opportunity for six Oblates to share their personal understanding and experience of hospitality. By listening to their stories, the Oblates were challenged to look at hospitality in new ways.

The panelists were: Madeleine Callahan (Bloomington, IL), Lori Carroll (Muscatine, IA), Bill Maakestad (Macomb, IL), Sharon McNamara (Bloomington, IL), Susan Ramiro (Peoria, IL), and Ric Smith (Muscatine, IA).

During noon day prayer with the Sisters, the Oblate community renewed their promise in the monastery Chapel. Four people made their oblation to follow the way of Benedict, and five people began their Oblate journey as candidates.

Below is an excerpt from Ric Smith’s story of hospitality, and page 10 includes highlights from the other panelists.

Hospitality Behind Bars

“In 1986, my former childhood friend, Gary, was involved in the murder of a man in Alabama. Cynthia and I were living in Montgomery, and began visiting Gary at Holman Prison in Atmore, AL.



Gary's cellmate, Robert, never had visitors, and Gary arranged for Cynthia and our young daughters to be put on the visitor list for Robert.

Hannah and Emma loved prison visit days! We arrived with rolls of quarters for the visitation yard vending machines, and the girls brought crayons and coloring books. There was talking and laughter while the girls colored. Behind the prison bars we became family.

Our little girls paid no attention to the razor wire at the tops of the fences as we walked into and out of the prison, or the loud buzzes and clanks of the numerous gates. If the inmates hadn't worn white, no one could have distinguished the prisoner from the visitor.

Robert built doll houses which were sold at the prison store, and soon he began building a doll house for the girls. The house came completely painted and furnished, and was constructed in sections so that Robert could get it out through his cell door.

On Emma's 3rd birthday, we picked up the doll house at the end of our prison visit. The girls were excited as we loaded the doll house in the trunk of our old Buick. When they no longer played with the dollhouse, we safely stored it in our basement, waiting for the third birthday of Emma's little girl, CeCe, who now plays with the doll house.

**“Let all guests be received
as Christ.”**

THE RULE, CHAPTER 53

Gary was executed by lethal injection in 2003, and Robert died of heart disease, still in prison, around 2012.

I wonder who offered the hospitality in this story? Like most examples of hospitality, it was and is a mutual gift.

Gary didn't *have* to arrange to have Cynthia and the girls put on Robert's visitation list. Robert didn't *have* to spend hours building a doll house for Emma's birthday. We didn't *have* to take our daughters into a strange and potentially disturbing situation. We all gave and we all received.

Hospitality means we reach out to each other because we need whatever it is that only loving hospitality can satisfy.”



Oblate Day panelists Bill Maakestad, Susan Ramiro, Sharon McNamara, Lori Carroll, Madeleine Callahan and Ric Smith

Panelist Highlights, Oblate Day 2022

In addition to Ric Smith's story, below are panelist highlights who shared about the mutual experience of giving and receiving hospitality.

Having spent time living in Germany and Africa, **Sharon McNamara** learned hospitality is reaching out to see the Christ in others. Sharon considers sharing her time as an integral part of hospitality. "What more precious gift can we give to another than our time?"

Bill Maakestad's life has been enriched by reading the Rule of St. Benedict, and witnessing hospitality during his visits to St. Mary Monastery. "I've been inspired by the way the Sisters of St. Mary Monastery welcome and work with women from different faith traditions, including Jewish, Buddhist and Muslim women."

In her poem "Hospitality for Xavier", bilingual young **Madeleine Callahan** interpreted for Xavier who had recently arrived from France. For offering hospitality to Xavier, Madeleine was sometimes teased and excluded. Part of the risk of offering hospitality is not everyone is ready to receive it with an open heart. Hospitality and hostility sometimes coexist.

Lori Carroll traveled to Kosovo on a musical mission trip in 2005 – only six years after war had devastated the country. "We expected to find the people depressed and angry, but instead they smiled freely and welcomed us into their homes. We received far more than we gave."

Susan Ramiro experienced unexpected hospitality on a medical mission trip to Guatemala. "A mother was so grateful for ways we included her teenage son that she invited our entire group for lunch in their home. We were served authentic tamales, but what touched us most was that in their poverty, they opened their hearts and gave from what little they had."

Watch the St. Mary Monastery website in the coming months to read their full presentations.

In Memoriam . . .

St. Mary's Academy Alumnae

Linda Porth '68, died January 21, 2021

Marina Montez Castel SMA '61, died September 27, 2022

Oblates

Bloomington Oblate **Gayle Eyre** died in November 2022

Peoria Oblate **Roberta Pikey** died September 27, 2022

Friends

Ronald Clow died on July 27, 2022, husband of Diana Gordon Clow, SMA '68

William Hedgepeth died July 20, 2022, husband of Sally Hanrahan Hedgepeth, SMA '55

Larry Hopp died on July 26, 2022, husband of Betty Kraft Hopp, SMA '58 and long-time head of maintenance at the Nauvoo Monastery

Barbara Uecker died on August 18, 2022, former Welcome Area volunteer

Jeffrey Shoen died December 21, 2022, husband of Diane Haas Shoen, SMA '73

B.J. Keegan died on December 28, 2022, former Welcome Area volunteer

Welcome, Oblates!



(Left to right): Dana Pendleton, Michael Sigwalt, Julia Albarracin, and Jan Fries





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Jan Gull, Editor

Finding Resilience While Embracing Grief to Recreate Life

Saturday, February 25, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

On-site Fee: \$70 (includes lunch)

Virtual Fee: \$55

Facilitator: Elaine Olson - ordained pastor,
spiritual director and Licensed Clinical Counselor



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