



PATHWAYS

Newsletter of the Duluth Benedictine Sisters

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Letter from the Prioress

In her book, *The Reed of God*, Caryll Houselander describes Advent as the season of the seed, the seed of Christ, the Bread of Life growing within Mary. "Like the golden harvest in the darkness of the earth," writes Houselander, "the Glory of God was shrined in her darkness," growing silently there in the humility and simplicity of her daily life.

Like Mary we carry the seed of Christ within us, shrined in the darkness of our lives and our faith. There He is growing as the Divine Love whose presence and loveliness we offer to others in the self-giving of our daily lives. "During this tender time of Advent we must carry Him in our hearts to wherever He wants to go," says Houselander, "and there are many places to which He may never go unless we take Him to them." Or more truly, there are many places where His presence and love may not be known unless His radiance shines through us.

Every work we do is meant to be a manifestation of the Christ-life growing within us. Every joy, every sorrow holds within it the potential of revealing Divine Love slowly unfolding like the loveliness of a budding flower or the emerging brilliance of dawn.

It is the Holy Spirit who quietly sows and grows the Christ-seed within us and who gifts us with the grace to patiently and faithfully tend to its unfolding through prayer, times spent immersed in the beauty of creation, and in the sacrament of daily life. It is the Spirit of Wisdom who works ceaselessly in the earth of our being to bring the Christ-life to birth.

The cover of this issue of *Pathways* features the magnificent Great East Window of the Chapel/Library complex here at our Monastery. It celebrates Our Lady Queen of Peace for whom the Chapel is named and to whom it is dedicated. The breathtaking beauty of this entire stained-glass window speaks of peace and symbolizes all that we celebrate in the holy Advent/Christmas Season. As in Mary, the Christ shrined in our inner darkness is brought to birth. In us, too, Christ asks that He may grow secretly, that He may be the light shining through the darkness of our lives.

Like the stained glass window depicting Our Lady Queen of Peace, may our true beauty be revealed as we open ourselves fully to Christ coming to birth, breathing light and love, healing and hope through us into the world.

May you and all your loved ones know the peace and joy of this Holy Season and rejoice in God's immeasurable love for you throughout the New Year.

Lovingly in Christ our joy
with deep gratitude and prayer,

Sister Lois Eckes
Sister Lois



Glimpsing Tomorrow's Promise: An Advent Reflection

By Sister Ann Marie Wainright

Resurrection.

As I walked into the woods behind the Monastery on a beautiful fall morning, I meditated on the mysteries of Christ's life. Gold, orange, and red leaves glowed as the warming sun chased the chill from the air. I paused a moment beneath the canopy of the trees, listening to the breeze gently rustle the leaves. In their own quiet way, the trees were singing, praying, waiting.

Agony. Dying.

Autumn is both a time of glory and a time of loss. Even as the trees display glorious and resplendent color, they are letting go, turning their energies inward to survive the long, cold winter. The trees wait...and prepare. New growth will come in the spring, but first they must let go and die a little. Their fallen leaves decay and return as natural compost to the earth. Their barren branches will bear a heavy burden in the months to come.

Expectation. Birth.

Again I walked into the woods, this time on a cold, crisp winter morning. Winter transformed the woods into a winter-white wonderland, each snowflake making the landscape more beautiful than before. The trees held their breath in silent anticipation, expectant waiting. Deep within their branches, the tiniest green buds of next spring are just beginning to form. Something *is* coming. Something is *already here*, but it is mysteriously hidden within the surrender, the emptiness, and the cold, dying daylight of winter.

Mystery.

In each moment the Divine is breaking into our lives – sometimes quietly, sometimes boldly and insistently. Every encounter bears promises hidden within the mystery of the ordinary: a dry, brown leaf on the ground; a snowflake on a gloved hand; a tiny baby born in a filthy stable to an impoverished couple; a working-class man turned preacher, defying everyone's expectations.

God constantly invites us to glimpse that for which we wait and hope, but how often we do not see it! Something greater, something extraordinary, is waiting to change our lives for the better. Before we can catch a glimpse of tomorrow's promise of hope, we must stop holding onto today's understanding of certainty.

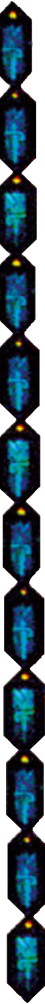
"For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it?" (Is. 43:19 NLT)

Nature teaches us that the unveiling of mystery's secret only comes when we learn to hold *lightly* in the hand all the resplendent colors of what we hold dear today; when we learn to live for a time in the ambiguous shades of faith's shadowy grays; when we trust that what blossoms *forth* will be filled with God's favor, wholeness and love. God leads us, like a child in hand with its mother. With God, we touch with tiny outstretched finger the amazing beauty that is constantly breaking into our lives.

May your Advent be filled with wonder and awe as you wait, hope, and trust in God's promise, which is surely coming, is among us even now, and is *within* you.



Photo by Sister Edith Bogue



Our Journey Into “A Future Filled with Hope”

First in a series of three articles by Sister Judine Mayerle, Chair, Monastery Strategic Planning

Most religious communities throughout the United States today are dealing with diminishing membership, a rising median age, and a change in ministries. As a result, their role in maintaining the infrastructure they built in health care and education for more than a century is now being given over to the leadership of the dedicated laity who carry on their mission. Like many religious communities we Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery have been blessed with visionary women and men who have joined us in leadership roles in our ministries of higher education and health care. We have also been blessed with new members (seven women in initial formation) and renewed interest in vowed membership. Thus despite the changing landscape of religious life in today's Church and culture, we enter the second decade of the Third Millennium with hope and trust. Our more than 125-year history as Benedictine women in the Diocese of Duluth has been in response to God's will for us, and we continue to seek what God is calling us to do as we look to the future.

Although we Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery have done strategic planning at various times over the years, our approach to Strategic Planning/Phase I in Spring 2010 was quite different from what we have done in the past. Working with consultant Donna Fyffe, founder and president of Community Works, Inc. of Indianapolis, we identified key issues and concerns regarding the quality of our monastic life and our ministries as Benedictine women in the 21st century. When our focus centered on two key questions—what future did we envision for our monastic community, and what actions would we need to take to create that future—a simple and unique theme emerged: space.

Our Community history shows that very often the space that was available or the space we created for our ministries dictated in large part how our life would be lived. So while space itself might seem rather mundane, it holds the potential for incredible paradigm shifts, for a change from one way of thinking to another, to a deliberate transformation of our lives.

As we framed the structure of our strategic planning last year, we set up six research groups with six-eight Sisters in each: current Monastery space, public use of Monastery space, Sisters' living space, Benet Hall (our assisted living area at the Monastery), and McCabe Renewal Center (a 4-acre property a few miles from the Monastery). As sponsors of a college and health care institutions and systems, we knew it was vital to include sponsorship as the sixth group in our strategic planning, i.e., how to ensure the best future for the institutions we founded during our early history and helped grow to the present day.

The research groups collected data through a variety of means over a period of ten months, synthesized that data during numerous meetings, and kept the Community apprised of their work during evening presentations, Community Days, and Chapter meetings from the end of July 2010 to May 1, 2011. The entire Community was engaged in the process through discussions, readings, and reports from the research groups. During this time we were also in discernment for Election of Prioress in June 2011, and the articles we read and the discussions we had in preparation for that election were closely aligned with our strategic planning.

The result of the first year of Strategic Planning was our Directives Statement, ratified by the monastic Community on May 1, which set our direction for 2011-2015/2017. The four Directives, which flowed from our Mission and Core Values, reflected the results of our preliminary study of communal, personal, and public space, and the changes we could make to enhance the quality of our monastic lives and ensure the viability of our ministries. Our Directives also included our desire to create a model of sponsorship reflective of our values, capacities, and the needs of our institutions; the mentoring of Sisters for membership on boards; and our continued commitment to mission effectiveness in health care and higher education.

Our Community history, our life in Duluth, has been shaped by our living space and the space of our ministries. Our history is a continuation of the story begun 160 years ago when the first Benedictine women to settle in North America arrived at St. Mary's, Pennsylvania, from Eichstatt, Bavaria, and from there came



Consultant Donna Fyffe

Photo by Sister Ann Marie Wainright

to St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph, Minnesota, and from there to Duluth. These European Benedictine women left their abbey and homeland with generous hearts and a spirit of adventure in response to the request of Abbot Boniface Wimmer of St. Vincent's Archabbey of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, for Sisters to serve the needs of the many German-Catholic immigrants in what was then known as the "rural frontier."

It is quite probable that our foremothers expected to continue their European monastic way of life. However, because of the difficult living situations in what was very much frontier country, because of the poverty of both the Sisters and the immigrants they served, the Sisters had to adapt their former lifestyle to their new circumstances in order to both survive and to serve, and that new lifestyle was more apostolic than monastic. The most evident and difficult adaptation for the Sisters was space, that is, the Sisters' inability to observe the traditional European cloister because their crowded buildings often served as both convent and school, and later as both convent and hospital. As a result, some members of the Church hierarchy in Rome believed the American Benedictine women were apostolic rather than monastic.

Ministry in the fledgling Catholic Church of Minnesota kept the Benedictine Sisters so occupied with missionary endeavors that they did not think about the long-term consequences of being regarded as "apostolic," nor did they use their time and resources trying to reclaim their full monastic identity. Rather, their energy was expended in responding to the demands of bishops and pastors for schools, orphanages, and hospitals, and for the evangelization of the immigrants.

This was the life of our Sisters who founded St. Scholastica Monastery in 1892. They were poor, they served the poor, their living quarters were secondary to and often part of their schools and orphanages and hospitals, they were under the jurisdiction of the local bishop which in our early history was often contentious. However, although our foremothers were deprived of some aspects of monastic life, they never wavered in their conviction that they were faithful to the Benedictine tradition. In the first half of the 20th Century, Benedictine communities of women began to organize themselves into congregations which placed them under the auspices of the Vatican rather than the local bishop. In 1959 the Duluth Benedictine Sisters joined the Congregation of St. Benedict (today renamed "Federation" and comprised of ten independent monasteries). After the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) Benedictine women followed the mandate of the Council to reclaim the charism of their founders while adapting their Benedictine heritage to contemporary culture. Many changed the name of their motherhouses from "convent" to the monastic terminology of "priory," and, more recently and accurately, "monastery."

Recognizing that "space" had a significant impact on our historical growth, we knew it would be significant as well to the first stage of our strategic planning. When our foundress, Mother Scholastica Kerst, then prioress of St. Benedict's Convent in St. Joseph, Minnesota, stepped off a train in Duluth on a snowy

Wednesday afternoon on December 15, 1880, we see the beginning of the tension that would develop between Sisters' living space and the space needs of their ministries. Hers was an exploratory trip, a quick in and out, in response to an invitation for Sisters from St. Benedict's to start a school in Sacred Heart parish. She was only in Duluth overnight and part of the next morning, and when she left she had agreed that Sisters would come to Duluth to live and teach in an old frame building, used in former times as a livery barn and carriage house.

Continued on page 6



Photo by Sister Ann Marie Wainright

Sister Beverly Raway and Sister Judine Mayerle find a light moment in a strategic planning session.

Three Sisters opened the school on January 15, 1881, with 200 students enrolled after the first two weeks. But the overcrowded ramshackle building was very cold, in an extremely cold Duluth winter, and the deplorable conditions in which the Sisters lived and tried to teach led to the school closing at the end of the school year in May and the Sisters' return to St. Benedict's.

Three years later, when suitable quarters were secured, the Sisters returned to Duluth and began the long saga of "space." Our founders went from rented space in Munger Terrace where two units housed both the Sisters and their academy, to the Sacred Heart Institute (our first motherhouse) shared with students, to the purchase of 160 acres on Kenwood Avenue on which they first built Tower Hall where the Sisters' residence mingled with classrooms and student bedrooms, to the 1938 completion of the Chapel/Library and the cloister walks and Stanbrook Hall, a private girls' high school which also had three residence areas for Sisters. Our mindset in building over the years was more apostolic than monastic, with Sisters' bedroom corridors opening on to classroom halls, monastic space secondary to ministry needs. Certainly this integration of monastic space and ministry space shaped our lives in ways we did not realize or question at the time. This changed in 1991 with the completion of Stanbrook West when, for the first time, we designed and constructed a building specifically for our own needs as monastic women. Major renovation of Stanbrook Hall in the mid-1990s converted the former high school building to space that was more monastic.



Photo by Sister Lisa Maurer

Sister Jean Maher, Sister Mary Susan Dewitt, and Sister Dorene King reflect on strategic planning materials during a Community Day.

(Sisters Ann Marie Wainright, Donna Schroeder, Beverly Raway, Edith Bogue, Helen Giesen, Judine Mayerle/Chair, Judith Oland, and Sarah Smedman). The Team continues to work with consultant Donna Fyffe and has developed the desired outcomes for the coming year based on the larger issues and challenges that were explicit or implied in last year's study. The Community will discern and decide how to address them. A timeline or "planned work flow" has been outlined in response to "what do we wish to accomplish this year, where do we wish to be one year from now?"

The challenging questions for the Community's strategic planning are, "What future do we envision for this Community? How do we create the future we wish to have? How do we steward our resources—our members as well as our tangible assets—to ensure the long-term viability of our Community? What is God's will for us as we move into the second decade of the Third Millennium?"

We have dedicated this year of our Strategic Planning/Phase 2 to Our Lady Queen of Peace and ask her intercession as patroness of our journey, a journey, as the Prophet Jeremiah writes, into "a future filled with hope" (29:11).

Our Community grew and was formed here on this beautiful wooded hillside on Kenwood Avenue with its magnificent view of Lake Superior, in the early years miles from the city's center. Throughout our history the acquisition, use, and release of space has always reflected both our life needs and our ministries. Our utilization of space is complex because it affects our lives, our connection to the world, our ministries. Our study of space last year provides the infrastructure and impetus for this second year of strategic planning and calls us to creative decision-making as we focus our vision on the future we believe is God's will for us.

As we begin our Strategic Planning/Phase 2, we have changed the structure from five research groups to a single Strategic Planning Team of eight Sisters

Sister Profile: Sister Barbara Ann Vierzba

I was born November 16, 1943, in Brainerd, Minnesota, which remained my hometown throughout my growing up years. My parents were George and Rose (Schley) Vierzba, a combination of Polish and German descent. I had two older brothers. Mike, the oldest (deceased in 2009), followed by Ed. I was the third oldest. My younger siblings were Joanne, three years younger, Doug, seven years younger, and Mary, fourteen years younger.

My childhood experiences were happy. We had good neighbors with many children, so we were never bored. Each of us children learned early on how to take care of money. We had paper routes (from grades 2-9 for me). One of the first purchases we made with our earnings was a bicycle. It beat walking the two miles to school.

I attended the public school for Kindergarten and First Grade. Then I joined my two older brothers at St. Francis School. The first time I saw my brother's teacher, Sister Marianne St. Marie, I knew I wanted to be a Sister.

I attended Stanbrook Hall in Duluth my junior and senior years and then entered the Community on September 8, 1962. After my formation, my first teaching assignment was Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in Cloquet, Minnesota. From 1966 to 1971 I taught grades 4-6 in a modular setting which was very nice. From there I went to Chicago (1971-1974) to teach 5th grade. I had never been out of the state of Minnesota, and there I was driving in six lanes of traffic! St. Thomas the Apostle in Phoenix, Arizona, was my next assignment (1974-1979). I loved the desert, blue skies, and mountains! While at St. Thomas I had 4th, 7th, and 8th graders. During the summers I attended UMD and earned a Masters in Education in 1976. I loved Phoenix but was asked to be principal of St. James School in Duluth and also teach 6th grade part-time. In 1982 I moved on to my hometown, Brainerd, to be principal of St. Francis. There was something special about being principal of the school that I had attended. During my time there we put on an all-school reunion in July of 1984. The attendance exceeded our expectations. We also were the first in the Diocese to start a preschool. Following Brainerd, I went back to Phoenix for five more years of teaching 4th grade.

After my teaching years, I worked a year in our Business Office at the Monastery and then went to St. Paul to work in a program "Sisters Care." Even better than the program was the wonderful community I found at Holy Spirit Convent. I had a great year ministering to the elders in their home. In the meantime I had made application for the CPE (certified pastoral education) program at St. Mary's Medical Center in Duluth. I wanted to learn how to minister pastorally to the aged. Having completed the four units of CPE, I was looking for a job that would use my newly acquired skills. There was a job in chaplaincy opening in St. Otto's in Little Falls, Minnesota. I was the one selected to be chaplain at Unity Family Healthcare. In two weeks I made the move to Little Falls and started my new ministry on July 5, 1995. My years there were wonderful! I loved the residents at St. Otto's. And I was close to my mother in Brainerd.

Then in the summer of 1999, I was asked to be the Subprioress for our Community. I accepted and after twelve years in this position I have now passed these duties on to someone else.



Photo by Sister Joyce Fournier



Benedictine Center of Spirituality

By Sister Pauline Micke

A New Season Begins!

As we move into Advent and Christmas and the time before Lent, we will be offering some wonderful opportunities for reflection, prayer, and growth in your life's journey.

Saturday, November 19, 2011—Advent Retreat 9:15 a.m. registration—3:00 p.m.

“Advent: The Call to be Listeners and Lovers”: This retreat will invite us to look at our Christian story anew. We'll consider who are the messengers that God is sending today. We'll experience an inward journey of awareness which is about listening, loving, receiving, and sharing. Again we'll be affirmed that we are loved by God and are called to share that love with others and the whole world.

Facilitated by Sister Mary Josephine Torborg, OSB, Associate Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at The College of St. Scholastica.

Looking Ahead:

Saturday, January 14, 2012 8:30 a.m. registration—noon.

“Caregivers Need Care Too.” Sister Mary Carla Flood, OSB, MSW, LGSW, will facilitate this workshop. Self-care, especially spiritual self-care for those who are caretakers in any way for people with disabilities will be discussed. There will be time for sharing, dialogue, and interaction.

OUTREACH

On October 10-11, 2011, Sister Pauline Micke, OSB, Director of the Benedictine Center of Spirituality and Father Steve Ulrick, LSW, Pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Parish in Medina, Minnesota, presented a workshop on addiction and recovery using the 12-step process. “Walking the Walk: Becoming a Recovering Person” was given at the DECC for the St. Louis County Health & Human Services Conference. (This was Sister Pauline's 3rd year as a presenter and Father Steve's 2nd year.)



Father Steve Ulrick and Sister Pauline Micke

Update

Our newest offering—“Sabbath Day(s)” is becoming more and more known. It's a chance for people to “come apart” from everyday life for a day or a few days of quiet, prayer, solitude, and renewal.

For information contact Sister Pauline at 218-723-7086 or e-mail Pauline.m@duluthosb.org.

Highlights

Pax Christi Minnesota Assembly

By Sister Maria Volk

The Pax Christi Minnesota State Assembly 2011 met at Pax Christi Catholic Church in Rochester, Minnesota, September 17, 2011. Members present were Sister Mary Rae Higgins, Sister Linda Wiggins, Sister Maria Volk, Fred Cain, Kate Bradley, Mary Tanner, and students of The College of St. Scholastica: Elizabeth Miller, Courtney Cochran, and Flo Mopamoros.

The theme was “Breaking the Culture of Silence: Choosing a Nonviolent Path,” Coleen Rowley, keynote speaker. Workshops offered included, *Sharing Secrets of Faith and Hope in Haiti*, *Vets for Peace speaking on sexual violence in the military*, *Voices for Creative Nonviolence*, and *Mission 21: A Minnesota Perspective of Human Trafficking*.

Coleen Rowley brought to light some of the pre-9/11 security lapses and has testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee about endemic problems facing the FBI and the intelligence community. As an FBI Special Agent, she was one of the three whistleblowers chosen as persons of the year by Time Magazine. Coleen pointed out problems of secrecy, militarization control for power, and misleading the public through propaganda and fear factors. She maintains that Truth is power; that’s how you catch the bad guys. The day was meaningful, energizing, challenging, and rewarding.



Photo by Fred Cain

The Duluth Pax Christi members with Coleen Rowley (4th from left)

Monastery Open House

October 2, 2011, was the date of our annual Open House and Reception. Friends and family from Duluth and the surrounding area gathered for tea and fellowship in Rockhurst Dining Room and then toured various areas of the Monastery and Chapel. Over 160 guests made the day festive and blessed. Sister Lois thanked all for their support of the Sisters and for their prayers, and she then led the Sisters in singing a blessing—“We thank our God, each time we think of you, and when we pray for you, we pray with joy.”



Photo by Andi Therrien



Photo by Catherine Wright

Highlights, Continued

Benedictine Health System Annual Conference: A Good Time

By Sister Martha Bechtold

Hospitality. Stewardship. Respect. Justice. These are the Benedictine Core Values upheld by the Benedictine Health System (BHS), the health-care ministry uniting senior care facilities sponsored by St. Scholastica Monastery. These values, in concrete form, are seen in action at each of the long-term care facilities sponsored by the BHS. They were also in evidence at the recent annual BHS Leadership Conference held at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center from September 20-22. This annual conference calls together the leadership and board members of all the senior care facilities which are part of the BHS.

This year's conference opened with a festive event as food service staffs from many of the facilities put on the "Taste of Hospitality" to display their culinary skills. The chefs paraded into the dining hall in proper chef garb, chef's hats cocked properly to the right. Introductions and grand audience applause followed. Each had prepared two of the favorite foods of their facility, and guests were treated to a sample of each. There were judges to choose three top winners, and generous cash prizes were awarded to the food services in their home kitchens for upgrades in equipment.

The next days were scheduled with a full educational agenda. Conferences were held on new trends in senior care and ways in which BHS is initiating new styles of care. There were reports on the health of the System and the good things being achieved within its separate facilities. At the end of the conference an awards banquet featured a motivational speaker to send everyone home determined to carry out the values that are already so much a part of their separate entities.

Good care of our elders is appreciated by families who find it necessary to find a suitable home for their aging parent or other relative. The Benedictine Health System facilities try to earn the trust of each family whose member they serve.



Left: Sister Lois Eckes, OSB, (left) presents a Benedictine Spirit Award-Organizational Focus Honorable Mention to Mary Jensen, Madonna Living Community's Human Resource Director, and Cheryl Saballa, Housing Administrator for MLC's SHOW I CARE customer service program. SHOW I CARE is an acronym with reminders on how employees can demonstrate the Mission and Core Values through their interaction with residents and each other.

Right: More than 400 Benedictine Health System leaders traveled to Duluth for three days for the BHS Leadership Conference.



Photos by Sister Lisa Maurer

Harvest Time

By Sister Linda Wiggins

As a Chaplain at the Benedictine Health Center, Sister Mary Susan DeWitt brings sizable compassion, a listening ear, and deep joy to those in her care, along with the wisdom of many years of experience. She is in her 28th year of service at the Center.

One evening recently I observed Sister with her guitar, weaving her way amid dining tables where residents were sitting, while staff clad in flowered jackets bobbed intermittently among tables, diners, supply carts and trays—what a kaleidoscope of movement, song, and smiles emerged. She had an amazing repertoire of music and knowledge of a specific resident's favorite songs. Often inserting residents' names and nationalities into the music, she did not end the sing-a-long until those not able to dine in the dining rooms had also received special songs and visits in their rooms.

Providing spirit-lifting music, however, is only one of many services Sister Mary Susan fulfills in her ministry as Chaplain. Other services include attending care conferences with other staff members for individual residents; presenting information at staff orientations about spiritual care and Benedictine mission and values; offering phone ministry and support to a resident's family members; offering grief support; giving spiritual support and help with life problems to staff members; and making regular pastoral visits to residents.

Most important, of course, is her ministry to the dying. Tilting her head in a pensive manner, Sister ponders, "Dying well means the terminally ill resident has internalized two crucial facts: a) his/her life has 'made a difference,' and b) s/he will be going to a far better place." Listening intensely becomes a healing agent in helping the dying resolve any issues or relationships the resident either knows outright or must have help in discovering. Sister Mary Susan believes that the resident's family members and close friends need as much tender attention and support in their grief as the dying resident needs throughout the dying process.

Nonverbal techniques are very powerful at times for a Chaplain; Sister Mary Susan reflects on the many times she has just sat with a resident during the dying process and comforted by her presence or gentle touch. No words needed to be spoken. In fact, silence is soothing, especially for the soul. Other times, she might read aloud a poem or a psalm the resident would find comforting or softly say a favorite prayer. Residents and families find singing hymns and favorite songs helpful during a lengthy dying process. In any case, Sister Mary Susan describes the last dying moments as witnessing "the harvesting of a lifetime."



Dan Carroll sings to his wife, Sharon Carroll, as Sister Mary Susan plays the guitar.



Sister Mary Susan busy with phone ministry.

Photos by Sister Patricia Anne Williams

REMEMBERING THINGS PAST: THE BELL BENEDICT

By Sister Margaret Clarke

*"I praise the true God, I call the people, I assemble the clergy, I weep over the dead,
I call upon the faithful in time of pestilence that disease may cease."
—Ritual for the dedication of a church bell*

In 1921 the Duluth Benedictine community made several additions to the St. Scholastica campus, including a free-standing gymnasium, an extension to a lateral wing of Tower Hall and the construction of the first tower at the north end of the main building. In conjunction with the completion of this tower, Henry and Patrick Agnew, good friends of Sister Amata Macket, donated a two-thousand pound church bell to hang in it.

On November 14, 1921, Bishop McNicholas with a delegation of diocesan clergy came to dedicate the bell—a ceremony reminiscent in popular imagination to its baptism. Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Agnew were designated the bell's "sponsors." In accord with the ritual that dates back at least to the ninth century, the bell was first washed inside and out with blessed water, and then anointed with holy oil with seven crosses on the outside in commemoration of the seven sacraments and four crosses on the inside signifying the four corners of the world to which the bell would sound. Then the bishop prayed, "May this bell be hallowed, O Lord, and consecrated in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. In honor of St. Benedict. Peace be to thee." Thus the bell acquired its formal name: Benedict.



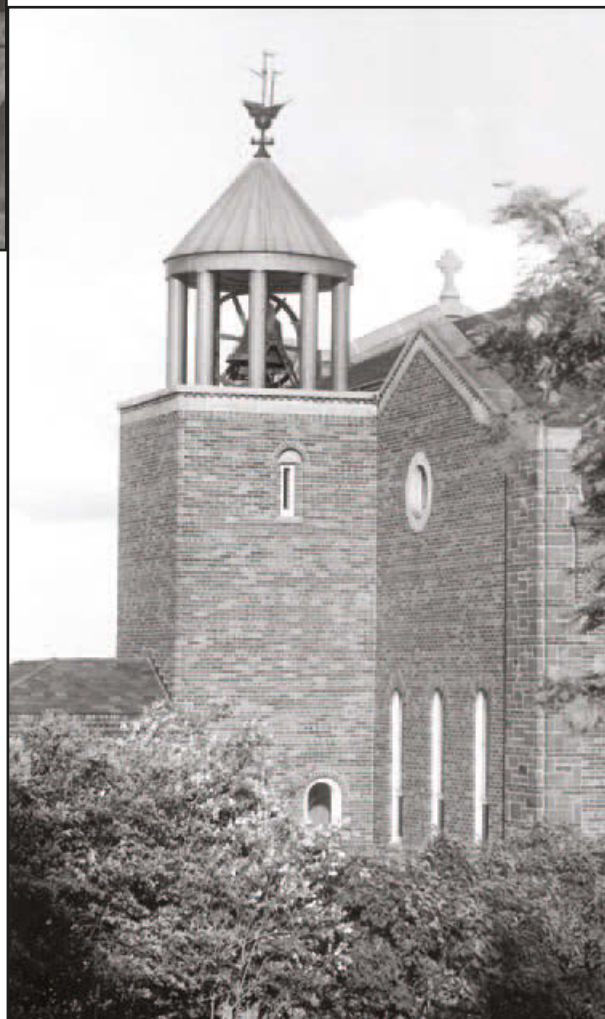
Left: First tower completed, 1921

Above: Scaffolding constructed to lift bell into tower



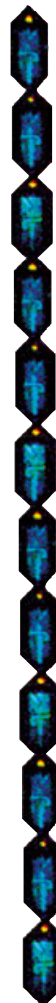
*Above: Workmen move bell onto scaffolding, 1921
Right: Benedict in the bell tower of Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel, 1938. The ringers' room is indicated by the larger curved window next to the trees. The weather vane represents the "bark of Peter"—the Church sailing through the storms of the centuries.*

Photos from Monastery Archives



Benedict hung in this tower and was rung to announce times for the Angelus prayer at dawn, midday, and evening, to call the Sisters to Mass, and to announce the passing of one of the Community members into eternal life. In accordance with the tradition common in the British Isles, the Angelus ring was a modification of the passing bell—the “3-3-3-33” pattern indicating the death of Jesus. “3-3-3” announced the death of a man (a woman was 3-3) and the 33 were the years of his life. In this Community, the passing bell still tolls the number of years of the Sister’s life at her funeral.

In 1938, with the completion of Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel and its separate bell tower, Benedict was moved to its present location. Until recently, generations of novices learned the arcana of manual bell-ringing: how to stop after an odd-number of “bongs” without the embarrassing “ding” indicating a neophyte ringer, and most importantly, how not to be lifted off one’s feet on an upward swing. A few years ago, with the decline in the number of able-bodied young Sisters, the whole mechanism was automated, and now everything is generally done electronically, although the bell can still be rung manually.



SO, WHAT'S A NUN?

By Sister Mary Catherine Shambour

Photo by Jeff Frey; courtesy of CSS



This may seem a strange question to ask our faithful readership. Most of you have known or been taught by members of our Community over the years. So why pose the question? The answer is that you are a minority, and if you wish to see religious life continue you can help us set the record straight.

First of all, most of you have never met a *nun* unless you have spent time in a cloistered monastery. (I myself met my first American nun last year.) *Nuns* are women religious who have professed solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and live a life of prayer and penance within cloistered communities known for centuries as monasteries.

Sisters are women religious who also have taken traditional religious vows but are engaged in active ministries among the public usually outside the convent, their place of residence. And there are further subdivisions under these headings. Though the terms are frequently interchanged, it would be incorrect to refer to the women of St. Scholastica Monastery as *nuns* because of our active ministries.

Monastery and *monastic* are two additional terms that have, especially in the United States, been mistakenly understood as referring only to men and their place of residence whereas they pertain also to women (which confusion may explain why I have occasionally received a letter from a man wishing to enter our monastery.) Coming from the Greek *mono*, singular or alone, a monastic is a person who has come to a monastery for one purpose only: to seek God, to live, pray and work with a community under the direction of a superior and to follow a rule of life. Monasteries of both men and women have existed from the earliest days of Christianity and have played an important role in preserving and enriching the life of the Church.

However, as the population grew and new problems created by endless warfare, disease, poverty and industrialization plagued society, a new development occurred as laypersons, frequently married women, began to minister to the needs of suffering members of society. From such beginnings emerged a number of the great “active” or apostolic religious communities which often were required by the Church to follow the discipline, prayer schedule, and rules of monastic communities.

A further reversal of roles came about when some monastic communities were invited to America in the mid-nineteenth century to minister to the needs of the thousands of Catholic immigrants pouring into the country and needed to relinquish their monastic way of life and prayer to become “active” religious to meet the needs of the times. Such were the roots of the Benedictine community that came to Duluth in 1892.

A still further development (are you still with me?) occurred in the latter part of the twentieth century when all religious communities were asked to re-examine their mode of life to see if it still had relevance to the needs of the time and was true to the charism of their founders. After much soul-searching and countless meetings over a period of years, Benedictine Sisters in the United States re-wrote their constitutions and handbooks and made numerous changes that helped to restore the contemplative aspects of their foundation which also resulted in their name change to *Monastery*.

To sum up. We’ve “been there, done that” and now readily embrace the “hybrid version” of Benedictine monasticism into which we have evolved. It developed on American soil and we believe that today it still has a unique role to play in this era of salvation history when people are drifting farther from God as their center. We are Benedictine *sisters*, not *nuns*—although there are some monasteries of Benedictine nuns in the United States still living a cloistered life of prayer. We follow the *Rule of St. Benedict* adapted to modern times and have preserved its essentials: the centrality of prayer, communal living, the monastic promises (vows) and work. Another designation: “active contemplatives.”

Fast forward to 2011. A woman is inquiring about our religious life. I question, “Have you ever met or known Sisters?” She responds, “I’ve seen *Sister Act*.” There’s a lot to explain! With this mini-history of religious women maybe you can help us spread the word about who we truly are. More to follow.

Sister Profile: Sister Armella Oblak

By Sister Dorene King

Seeing Christ in the other was a Benedictine value instilled in Sister Armella Oblak long before she became a Benedictine Sister of St. Scholastica Monastery. As a child, she witnessed Christ in the hospitality of her dad as he shared stories with the neighborhood children and as she saw her mom readily respond to the medical needs of Soudan and Tower neighbors. Sister Armella knew the forgiving presence of Christ when she and her siblings saw her dad sit in a particular chair, a sign of someone having committed a wrongdoing, and remain there until the guilty one climbed onto her dad's lap and rested in his embrace.

Sister Armella has embraced Christ in the other through her lifelong gift of hospitality. This hospitality flows naturally from her compassionate heart, desire to serve, eagerness to help in all circumstances, and wonderful sense of humor.

On several occasions, I have witnessed Sister Armella's compassion for others. A woman, noticeably distressed and anxious, received a gentle word and a reassuring touch from Sister Armella. A Sister needed a listening presence plus genuine affirmation, and Sister Armella's heart responded to those needs.

Responding to the needs of others has taken Sister Armella on a variety of service avenues. She served as an elementary teacher and saw Christ in the children. When her class became aware that Sister Armella's dad had died, one child insisted that it was not true. That child shared, "Sisters don't have fathers." That comment amused Sister Armella and gave her consolation amid her sorrow.

The gift of relieving anxiety and distracting from discomfort was one of the landmarks of Sister Armella's years as a nurse. While she worked in labor and delivery at St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth, there were many occasions when she facilitated the process of delivery. As a woman was in labor, Sister Armella inquired whether she had decided on a name for her baby. Then Sister Armella suggested naming the baby Armella. The shock of contemplating such a name for her baby distracted the woman and the delivery went ever so smoothly. However, what also resulted from Sister Armella's suggestion was that many women named their baby Armella. No doubt this was a tribute to the Christ present in Sister Armella.

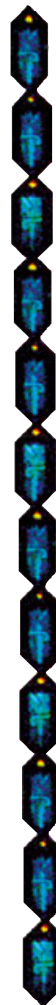
Following teaching and nursing, Sister Armella became the designer and first administrator of the Benedictine Health Center in Duluth. At the BHC her foresight brought the laughter and delight of preschool children to the residents, as she initiated the nursery school on the BHC premises.

After years of being the BHC Administrator, Sister Armella was called upon to offer her nursing and advocacy skills to the people of North Dakota. She improved the quality of many nursing homes through her instruction of staff, and her passionate pleas for funding resulted in the North Dakota legislature passing a bill to help fund those nursing homes.

Sister Armella's compassion, humor, and service are continuing signs that she follows the Benedictine value of seeing Christ in the other and being the presence of Christ to those whom she encounters.



Photo by Sister Joyce Fournier



UNDER CONSTRUCTION

By Sister Lisa Maurer

It seems that everything everywhere is under construction. I have noticed interstate highways and city streets, local discount stores, and city parks are all in the midst of construction. Even our property here at St. Scholastica is not exempt from the hassle, dust, and noise of construction.



The digging resulted in tunnels connecting several buildings on campus.



The newest addition (left) rises in front of the oldest campus building, Tower Hall.

Photos by Sister Lisa Maurer

The College of St. Scholastica is in the middle of a building project that has many facets, including an addition to the Science Center, underground tunnels, and new parking. This project is taking place right outside Our Lady Queen of Peace Chapel. Daily we witness the change, we watch the construction workers proudly and masterfully go about their business, and we observe the building take shape right before our eyes.

This hustle and bustle of construction may seem contrary to the holy season of Advent. Normally when we think of Advent we think of long dark nights scarcely illuminated by candles, candles that are lit slowly and deliberately one week at a time. We might think of quiet days of anticipation and preparation, days that are marked off one at a time. Sometimes we think of times of stillness, a stillness that awaits the coming of the Savior. But I dare to say that Advent is about building; after all the Prophet Isaiah is all about construction. We hear in Isaiah, “A voice cries out: In the desert prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country, a broad valley.”(Isaiah 40:3-4) That sounds like a lot of construction to me!

Interiorly and externally we are always building. The God who formed us and created us instilled in us the power to create, to build, and to construct. We are called to build up the Kingdom of God. Every day we construct relationships, communities, and networks of support. This is how we were made. Think about all the ways you build up the Kingdom, within yourself, among your family and friends and in society. Think about the ways God is working in the lives of his people. He is constantly constructing and re-constructing us more and more into the image of Christ.

A bulletin board in my first grade classroom read, “I am me and I am good because God doesn’t make junk,” and later that same bulletin board read “Be patient with me because God isn’t finished with me yet.” I have never forgotten those words and they still ring true today. They speak to me about God’s active hand in my life and in the world. I take comfort in the truth that God is creatively building his Kingdom and I am awed to be a part of it. Be it a highway, a college campus, or my own heart, I think it is a magnificent wonder that we are still *under construction*.

We Remember and Celebrate

By Sister Sarah Smedman



All Soul's Day, November 2, is a day of remembrance for loved ones who have passed away. This Christian feast has its roots in ancient cultures, originally in the Pagan Festival of the Dead, which commemorated the folk belief that the souls of the dead would return to celebrate a meal with the family.

The Catholic tradition of the Feast of All Souls began independently of the Feast of All Saints, and owes its beginning to seventh century monks who offered Mass on the day after Pentecost for the deceased members of their community. In the late tenth century the Benedictines of Cluny moved the date to November 2, the day after the Feast of All Saints, that the entire Communion of Saints might be celebrated together. By the fourteenth century the custom had spread to other monasteries and parishes throughout Europe, and Rome had put the feast, officially "The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed," on the Church calendar for November 2.

At St. Scholastica Monastery we carry on the centuries-old Benedictine and Catholic tradition in a simple but beautiful ritual embedded in our Vespers prayer for the day. In 2011 we remembered nine Sisters who have died since November 2, 2010. The ordinary call-to-prayer bell is replaced by the funeral bell, tolled for two minutes. While the Community remains seated, Sisters, each of whom bears a lighted lamp for one of the deceased, process solemnly down the Chapel aisle to the altar, where one by one they place the lamp on the altar. As each lamp is placed, Sister Lois, the Prioress, reads a brief commemoration of the deceased Sister, recalling who she was and what she had accomplished during her life, why we loved her in life and will remember her in death. A brief silence follows, allowing time for individual prayers for the deceased. When the last lamp has been placed on the altar, the Community sings a special Monastic Evening Prayer. Only after the recessional are the lamps extinguished; they will not be lit again for these particular Sisters. We have said our final public, ceremonial farewells and blessings.

The lighted lamps symbolize the Sisters' vowed lives as Benedictines. Each lamp was once carried and placed on the altar by the Sister herself at her final profession, at her Golden and Diamond Jubilees, and was placed on her casket at her funeral until the Prioress at last extinguished it as a sign that an earthly life had transcended into heavenly light.

The nine Sisters whose lives and deaths we celebrated on November 2, 2011, were blessed with diverse gifts, but each of them was devout and dedicated, self-assured and strong, faith-filled and faithful. Each gave unstintingly, humbly, and graciously of herself all the years of her life. They are, clockwise from top right:

Sister Celine Plante, d. November 26, 2010

Sister Ethel (Emiline) Radtke, d. November 27, 2010

Sister Timothy Kirby, d. December 22, 2010

Sister Joan (Antonine) Braun, d. February 5, 2011

Sister Bertrand Reiser, d. February 15, 2011

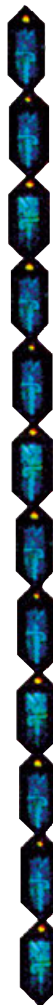
Sister Lea Pocta, d. March 16, 2011

Sister Rita Ann (Mary Louis) Beaulieu, d. April 23, 2011

Sister Renee Cormier, d. June 9, 2011

Sister Mary Odile Cahoon, d. October 2, 2011

Our gratitude to and for them is immeasurable. May they rest in peace.



In Loving Memory



Photo courtesy CSS



Moving the Biology Department to the new Science Building in 1968.



Sister Mary Odile and Sister Janelle Cahoon at Céide Fields in Ireland 1995.

SISTER MARY ODILE (MARGERY) CAHOON

July 21, 1929-October 2, 2011

Sister Mary Odile (Margery) Cahoon, OSB, 82, of St. Scholastica Monastery died Sunday, October 2, 2011, at the Monastery. Born in Houghton, Michigan, on July 21, 1929, she was the daughter of William and Ruth (Smothers) Cahoon and was Valedictorian of the Houghton High School Class of 1947.

An outstanding scholar and researcher, she studied at The College of St. Scholastica from 1947-1950. Sister Mary Odile subsequently earned a B.S. at DePaul University, Chicago, in 1954, where she graduated cum laude, majoring in Biology with minors in Math and Chemistry and earned an M.S. degree in 1958 in Biology. She received a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in 1961 with concentrated studies in Cellular Physiology, Biochemistry, and Cytology.

She spent many summers participating in research both in the United States and abroad. Her most memorable experience was joining her co-researcher Dr. Mary Alice McWhinnie of DePaul University, to spend nine months in a U.S. Antarctic Research Program at McMurdo Station in 1974. They were the first two women ever to spend the winter in Antarctica. Their research project was titled "Metabolic Studies of Cold Resistance of Invertebrates and Fish in Antarctic Waters." She published many articles in scientific publications.

Sister Mary Odile recently celebrated her 60th year of Monastic Profession on August 14, 2011. She had entered the Duluth Benedictine community September 8, 1949, during her junior year of college. On July 11, 1951, she professed her monastic vows. She began her teaching ministry at St. Timothy's School in Chicago from 1951-1954, and from 1954-1977 she taught in The College of St. Scholastica's Biology Department. Sister also had an illustrious career as an administrator beginning in 1961 when she served as Chair of the Biology Department until 1973. She was Academic Dean (1963-1967), Chair of the Natural Science Division (1971-1976), Vice-President/Academic Dean (1976-1981) Senior Vice President/Dean of the College (1981-1993) and Senior Vice President (1993-2004). Other administrative roles she filled over the years were with the North Central Association as Consultant-Evaluator and Commissioner-at-large; with the National Science Foundation as Proposal Evaluator; with the Minnesota Private College Research Foundation as Faculty Development Proposal Evaluator; and with the United States Department of Education as Title III Reader and GAANN field reader. She developed the Ireland Study Center in Louisburgh, County Mayo, in 1979, continuing as its director for twenty-five years. It was the first study abroad program of The College of St. Scholastica, enabling students and faculty to study in Ireland for a full term.

Sister Mary Odile received numerous honors and awards during her academic career, including a National Science Foundation Science Faculty Fellowship; Outstanding Educator of the Year: 1972; Listings in American Men and Women in Science and World Who's Who of Women; Fulbright Seminar member for International Education: Germany 1989; and she was named Professor Emerita at The College of St Scholastica in 1998. In addition, she served on many boards over the years: Board of Benedictine Sisters Benevolent Association; Board of Trustees of St. Mary's Medical Center (Vice Chair, Chair); The Duluth Medical Education Council (Chair); Board of Directors of St. Joseph's Medical Center, Brainerd, (Vice Chair, Chair); Polinsky Medical Rehabilitation Center Board of Directors; St. Francis Regional Medical Center Board of Directors, Shakopee, MN; Board Member of Fulbright Association-Minnesota Chapter (Secretary/Treasurer); and Board of the Benedictine Health System. For the last 13 years of her life, Sister Mary Odile served as Treasurer of St. Scholastica Monastery.

Despite all her accomplishments, Sister Mary Odile enjoyed the simple things in life. When she could, she liked to walk, read, or make beautiful stained-glass ornaments to give to the Sisters for various occasions or to sell at Christmas sales. But her quiet priority was monastic prayer. As the homilist said at her funeral, "Mary O. helped me to have a glimpse of God." After her death, this reflection was found in Sister Mary Odile's room: "To love is to be free to die, to leave all things unfinished, to go to God without regretting the interruption."

Sister Mary Odile was preceded in death by her parents, Ruth and William Cahoon, and her beloved sisters, Sister Janelle Cahoon and Aileen Coon. Besides the Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery, she is survived by her brother William James Cahoon and many devoted relatives and friends.

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE FOLOWING DECEASED FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS:

Donald Mills 9/13/2011

Thomas Bowie Spring, 2011

James A. Miner 9/18/2011

Florence LaVoie 10/22/11

Margaret Ringsred 10/24/2011

Florence Mengelkoch Westmeyer 10/26/2011
Sister of +Sister Mary Xavier Mengelkoch

John T. Paul 11/2/2011

Katherine Munson 11/2/2011

Father James Crossman 11/3/2011

Leo McDonnell 11/7/2011

Lillian Hayden 11/9/2011

Jacqueline Gow 11/12/2011
Sister of Sister Mary Clare Hall

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Like the stained-glass window depicting Our Lady Queen of Peace, may our true beauty be revealed as we open ourselves fully to Christ coming to birth, breathing light and love, healing and hope through us into the world.

Sister Lois Eckes