

PATHWAYS



NEWSLETTER OF THE BENEDICTINE SISTERS

DULUTH MINNESOTA

Advent, 2006

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Hope-Filled Waiting

By Sister Theresa Spinler

Waiting, with a sense of expectation and mystery! I'm reminded of this summer's experience in Rome as I climbed the cupola at St. Peter's. The long, narrow, winding, steep journey of steps filled me with a feeling of mysterious waiting and expectation. Finally, after hundreds of steps, the light and the beautiful vista of Rome appeared from the top of the dome. It was an awesome experience.

The experience of planting a garden conjures up these same feelings. After planting tiny seeds under the dark soil, one waits with patient and expectant hope. Sometimes it is a long wait, but the seeds will eventually burst forth in the fullness of time. The mystery of planting, waiting, and then rejoicing in the new growth is truly a miracle, an Advent miracle.

Each day holds its own Advent time of waiting and expectation. Rising in the early morning darkness and sitting in my chair looking to the east, I wait with eagerness. It is a time of prayer and inner preparation for the day. As I begin to pray, I continue to wait with anticipation and expectation for the coming of day. Each dawn manifests a different array of forms and colors. It is awesome to behold the wonder and beauty of creation. The dawn never disappoints, for it comes daily in its fullness just as the Son of God, Jesus Christ, comes in the fullness of time.

Advent is my favorite liturgical season of the year. Its Scripture readings exude the spirit of longing that helps enliven our hope-filled waiting and expectation of the coming Savior. This time of waiting commemorates not only the coming of Christ in history, but also the Savior who comes daily into each of our lives. We wait, we hope, we grow, and we change. Jesus Christ comes to birth and lives anew in us every day as we open ourselves more fully to the marvelous mystery of God's presence that permeates every part of our lives.



A Letter from the Prioress



Dear Friends,

The Advent/Christmas season is full of themes that echo in the depths of our human experience. Waiting, longing, hoping, and joyful anticipation culminating in the celebration anew of God's birth among us – all these find expression in the rituals and practices, the sacred texts and songs that inspire and nourish us throughout this beloved season. At the heart of all we celebrate in this holy time is the vulnerability of our God.



The word *vulnerable* comes from the Latin word, *vulnus*, which means “wound.” To be vulnerable means to be capable of being wounded or hurt and therefore able to suffer and die. God is vulnerable in Christ who emptied himself and became one of us (Philippians 2:6-11). God is vulnerable in Christ who poured out his life that we might have life to the full. God is vulnerable in Christ who came to reconcile us to God, to ourselves, to one another, and to all creation. God is vulnerable in Christ who is the Divine and Living Word, bringing us a love that saves and a hope that heals. God is vulnerable in Christ who empowers us to be vulnerable as well.

In Christ, we are given the grace to acknowledge and accept our own fear and insecurity before the enormous task of transformation. In Christ, face to face with the wonder of being God's beloved ones, we are invited to cherish our possibilities. In Christ, we dare to step forward in trust and tenderness to embrace the brokenness of others. In Christ, God transforms our small, vulnerable hearts into vessels of boundless grace. In and through Christ, God is born again and again in us, making our very lives sacraments of God's saving love and healing peace for our world.

The following poem speaks simply and profoundly of the heartbeat of God's vulnerability that pulses through the Christmas Mystery and resonates in the depths of our souls.

Cover Photo by Sister Joyce Fornier

THE SIMPLE STORY

A pregnant young girl,
pulled on a donkey
through the gray cold
by a tattered and tender
carpenter who can't
even find a room...

Here are all the signs
of insignificance.

A simple, crying child
stable-born,
warmed by straw
and cattle's breath...

He would die a
common criminal
hung on a cross.

But history would
never forget,
and those who believe in him
can still hear newborn cries
in the humble places
of their hearts.

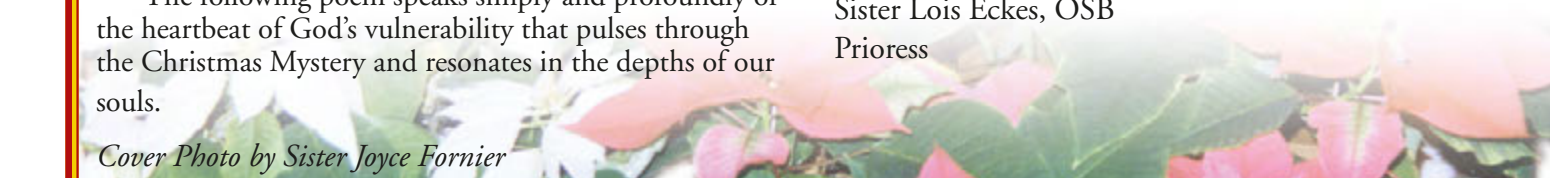
*Gary Boelhower, Ph.D., Chair
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May the wonder of “The Simple Story” be enfolded in us as we pour out our lives in love and work to end every kind of injustice and violence. May the promise and blessings of Christmas and a New Year of grace be yours as you let God's vulnerability in Christ be your own.

Lovingly with deep and prayer-filled gratitude for the gift you are,

Sister Lois Eckes

Sister Lois Eckes, OSB
Prioress



Sponsorship in Action

By Sister Margaret James Laughlin



Last year's Pathways carried a series of articles on institutional sponsorship—what it is, its religious and legal ramifications, the institutions involved. In this article the Sisters directly responsible for the vitality of sponsorship speak.

Sister Verda Clare Eichner, SMDC

Sister Verda Clare Eichner, Vice President, Catholic Healthcare Ministry, St. Mary's/Duluth Clinic Health System, "helps assure that the philosophy, mission, and values of the organization are vital, operational, and integrated throughout all departments, services, and activities."

Incidents such as the following encourage her. An employee whose son met with a very serious accident said, "If something like this had to happen to my son and me, this is absolutely the best place to be." For employees to feel this way tells Sister Verda Clare that SMDC is not only competent but carrying out its mission and values.

Photo by Jim Forneris



Sister Verda Clare (center) at the blessing of the renovated Garden Cafe.

Photo by Jim Forneris



Sister Verda Clare (right) conducts a blessing of the remodeled Medical Intensive Care Unit.

One of the most important things she does is to help SMDC's leadership understand the underlying values of our Benedictine heritage and Catholic identity, so they can create an environment that allows staff to carry out St. Mary's healing mission. To help provide such an environment requires her to involve leadership and staff in a variety of programs. In addition to the orientations, some of these programs are spirituality, days of retreat, blessings of hands for staff, services of remembrance for deceased employees, feast-day celebrations, ritual blessings for renovated areas, and commissioning services for leadership. Some staff comments about programs include: "This retreat was one of the best days of my life"; "Where else could we discuss spirituality with our co-workers?"; "After orientation I felt the caring and open arms as a new employee."

Sister Verda Clare knows that mission integration is always a work in progress—it will never be complete at any point in time because health care is dynamic. For the present she finds great job satisfaction in observing and hearing about the compassionate, as well as competent, care given by care-givers and support staff, the positive responses of the employees who are involved in programs, and the personal development of individuals.



Sponsorship in Action, Cont.

Sister Claudia Riehl, BHS

Sister Claudia Riehl, the director of mission integration for the Benedictine Health System, “works collaboratively with Mission and Community Affairs Department colleagues in furthering the integration of BHS mission and core values throughout the System.” Hers is a mobile mission—from home base in Duluth to the far reaches of North Dakota and to Idaho, Missouri, and Illinois. Her personal goal is to visit each of the System members at least once a year.

Map courtesy of BHS



Benedictine Health System Organizations

Sister Claudia believes that her primary task in each member institution is to build relationships with leadership and staff so that the integration can be effective. Relationship, she says, touches the heart and makes a difference in a person’s life. In addition to personal contacts, at each place she visits she makes a presentation to the entire staff; this year her presentation is on “stewardship,” the core value selected for emphasis throughout the System. She is also one of the presenters for Train-the-Trainer workshops on “Customer Service Standards” to train those selected to teach the rest of the staff in their facility, translating the values of our mission into action. She meets with all the local mission coordinators as a group periodically; this is their forum to help keep up on things nationally and for support and sharing of ideas.

Photos courtesy of BHS

Some of the other meetings she attends include Northland Healthcare Alliance, which consists of four health care systems with rural facilities in North Dakota, and the Catholic Health Association’s task force on community benefits—each institution’s contributions to its locale.

Sister Claudia says she finds it exciting and rewarding to help make mission and values come alive with enthusiasm in each place and to see the results in operation. A Mission and Values Survey is completed by all BHS employees annually. From these compilations each member institution selects three things to improve during the ensuing year and submits action plans to Sister Claudia for these areas.



Sister Claudia conducts an orientation at St. Mary’s Manor, Blue Springs, MO.

While the miles are many and the meetings endless, Sister Claudia enjoys their variety and is proud of being part of the continual cultivation of mission and values.



Sister Claudia between sessions at Carondelet.

Sponsorship in Action, Cont.



Sister Mary Rochefort, CSS

*S*ister Mary Rochefort, Associate Vice-President of Mission Integration for The College of St. Scholastica, “assists the administration, faculty, staff, and students of The College of St. Scholastica in understanding and appreciation of the Catholic Benedictine heritage and tradition and to carry that identity into the future.”

Sister Mary thinks that the best evaluation of Mission Integration at CSS is the fact that, when she began five years ago as Mission Coordinator, she was assigned ten minutes for her presentation on Mission to new faculty and staff. For the past three years the new faculty/staff orientation included a half-day on Mission, which included lunch at the Monastery and a tour of the Benedictine heritage room and chapel. Dr. Bill Campbell’s class, Introduction to Catholicism, requires each student to visit a parish and the Monastery. One student said, “They actually were the projects that I liked the most. I always wondered what it was like behind the Monastery walls.” Another: “I think, by far, going to dinner with the Sisters was the best thing in our class, if not the best thing I have done during my first year of college. I learned so much from the Sisters about what their lives are really like and the motivation behind what they do.”



Students enjoy the all-school luncheon provided for faculty, staff and students on the Feast of St. Scholastica, February 10, 2006.

The most exciting thing for Sister Mary at the present time is the spiritual journeying groups for women students—Spirit Seekers. There are five groups of 4-6 women each, and two facilitators, one Sister and one faculty/staff member.



Sister Mary Rochefort (left) and Heidi Johnson, who gave a presentation on the online digitalization of the College Scriptorium and Cable project to faculty, staff and students in October, 2006.

The Mission Integration Committee, composed of nine people, including faculty, staff, and students, chooses a Value for focus each year, and the year’s activities center around this choice. This year the Value is Stewardship. The Feasts of St. Scholastica and St. Benedict have been selected for special emphasis.

Sister Mary has two major challenges in her work: the first is finding suitable times to fit into faculty schedules already heavy with classes and other professional obligations, and the second is the difficulty of making ADEP (Accelerated Degree Evening Program) students feel connected. Not only are they in evening classes, but their location in Brainerd, St. Cloud, and St. Paul necessitates considerable travel time for her. Sister Mary’s greatest satisfaction at the present time is the increased awareness of Mission and Values throughout the College.

Photo courtesy of CSS



Benedictine Retreat

A Benedictine Weekend Retreat will be offered for single Catholic women at St. Scholastica Monastery, February 9-11, 2006. The retreat will include sessions on discernment, prayer, monastic life and offer an opportunity to dialogue with Sisters. There is no charge, but registration is required. Reserve the dates now. For more information contact Sr. Mary Catherine Shambour at 218-723-6646 or at mcschambour@duluthosb.org.

Sundaes on Thursday

By Sister Jeanne Ann Weber

Photo by Sister Patricia Anne Williams



Enjoying the ice cream toppings!

As a gesture of hospitality, the Monastery, in conjunction with College campus ministry, invited all the College students to come to the Monastery dining room for ice cream sundaes on Thursday, September 29th from 3-4:30. By happenstance, the whole College community ended up being invited! We wondered if we'd need the multiplication of our four gallon ice cream containers!

However, there was enough ice cream and delicious toppings for everyone. The event turned out to be a great mixer of students, faculty, staff, and Sisters. Everyone left with smiles, gratitude, a better knowledge of the Monastery, and the question: "Will this be an annual event?"

Pax Christi Minnesota State Assembly

By Sister Linda Wiggins

Edwina Gateley was the highly inspirational keynote speaker at this year's assembly titled "Rooted in God: Becoming a Just and Holy People in a World of Violence and War" that took place at Pax Christi Catholic Church in Rochester. The assembly was well-attended and included six Sisters from St. Scholastica Monastery. Ms. Gateley, born in Lancaster, England, spoke about her own experiences as a volunteer in Uganda from 1964-68. In 1969 she founded the Volunteer Missionary Movement (VMM), an ecumenical, non-profit organization that recruits and prepares volunteer missionaries. Today this organization has offices in England, Ireland, Scotland, and the United States and has sent over 1500 laypeople to Africa, Papua New Guinea, and Central and North America. An author of numerous books and articles, Gateley also founded Genesis House in Chicago. Pax Christi Minnesota has chapter meetings statewide. All those who are interested in participating in this peace effort may find information for state and local chapters online at www.paxchristi.org. The Duluth chapter meets monthly on the second Monday evening of the month at St. Scholastica Monastery. Inquiries are welcome.

PATHWAYS



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Blessing of Storage Shed

By Sister Martha Bechtold

*F*or many years two unsightly campus buildings stood across from the soccer field on the road to the cemetery. One was a pole building for storage of lawn mowers and much more; the other was an open front shed for sand used on icy roadways in the winter. Even though the buildings were practical, they did nothing to enhance the campus. But they are no more!



Sister Lois Eckes (left) and Sister Martha Bechtold at the blessing of the storage shed.

Photos by Andy Therrien



Sisters joined CSS staff at the blessing.

This summer a new pre-cast concrete building that serves both storage and sand/salt functions was constructed at a new site. The cement floor prevents sand and salt from leaching into the ground, killing surrounding plants and trees. The new building is attractive, sturdy, tidy, and functional. It bears the name "Wintergreen" to call attention to its two major tasks: to hold the sand and salt for wintertime use and to store lawn mowers and other grounds equipment for summer. A dedication, replete with songs, prayers, holy water, and bubbles was held on Thursday, October 19 to celebrate its completion. May it serve us well for many years to come.

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE FOLLOWING DECEASED RELATIVES AND/OR BENEFACTORS

Irene Cristea 4/11/06

Rosemary Arts Erhard 7/15/06

+Sr. Helen Clair Arts and +Sr. Vivian
Arts' sister

Eileen Balgaard 9/22/06

Terrance "Tad" Arntzen 9/25/06

Willard Hanley 10/7/06

+Sr. Emmanuel Hanley's brother

Joan Caspers 10/19/06

Sr. Susan Fortier's sister

Paul Chiabotti 10/06

Phyllis Conry 10/06

Marion Linck Steinbauer 10/26/06

Mary Lou Jarvis 11/1/06

Fr. Rudolph Pakiz 11/4/06

Anne G. Prout 11/06/06

June F. Williams 11/9/06

+Sr. Mary Horgan's sister

Bertha Shelerud 11/11/06

James Sawicki 11/18/06

Michael Motherway 11/23/06

Hospitality

By Sister Jean Maher



"In India" Ram Dass writes, "when people meet and part they often say, 'Namaste,' which means: I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides; I honor the place in you of love, of light, of truth, of peace. I honor the place within you where if you are in that place and I am in that place in me, there is only one of us . . . 'Namaste.'" In Benedictine spirituality, too, hospitality is clearly meant to be more than an open door. It is an acknowledgment of the gifts the stranger brings. Chapter 53 of the *Rule of St. Benedict* highlights the Benedictine value of hospitality. St. Benedict tells us, "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me." (Matt. 25:35)

I asked Sister Armella Oblak, hospitality coordinator at the Monastery, what she loved most about her ministry. Sister Armella, who has been in this ministry since the 90's, responded, "I really like working with people and making them feel at home. I consider it a privilege to take care of guests. You never know who's going to come. Maybe it's Jesus!" Those of you who have visited our Monastery will understand why I like to refer to Sister Armella as Sister Merry Hospitality. Her welcoming spirit is warm and wonderful!

Photo by Mary Farrell



Sister Armella greets visitors in the Chapel's Gathering Place.

Just as St. Scholastica Monastery is a center of hospitality, so too is McCabe Renewal Center. 2007 will mark the thirtieth anniversary of the birth of our retreat ministry at McCabe. This wonderful old home, which was built in 1914, was a gift given to the Benedictine Sisters by the John McCabe family in 1940. Sister Ingrid Luukkonen served as the first director of the center from 1977 to 1978 and offered fifty-four spiritual renewal events. I then took over the leadership from 1978 to 1981 and reactivated the Benedictine Oblate program during that time. Sister Martha Bechtold was the third director at McCabe serving from 1981-1994 and keeping the Oblate program alive and thriving. Sister Lois Eckes then faithfully served as the fourth director until she was elected prioress in 2005. Sister Lois then invited me to return to McCabe as director.



Sister Jean Maher offers individual spiritual direction.

As I reflect on the past thirty years of retreat ministry at McCabe, I am deeply grateful for the multitude of Sisters who have so generously brought hospitality in the form of life, love, laughter, and hope to this holy place. I also thank God for the wonderful lay people who have faithfully shared their time, talents, and treasures and friendships in the building and sustaining of this ministry.

May the Monastery and McCabe—these havens of hospitality—continue to grow and flourish for the honor and glory of God.



Photo by Sister Jean Maher

Pat Thompson (center) and Meridith Schifsky (right) conducted a Centering Prayer workshop at McCabe November, 2006.



Photo by Sister Jean Maher

Jane Haubrich Casperson (left) led a three-part Spirituality and Literacy workshop in November at McCabe.



Photo by Andy Therrien

Benedictine hospitality extends beyond the doors of the Monastery and McCabe. Above, Sister Lois welcomes guests at the October Reception in Wayzata, Minnesota.

Jelaluddin Rumi (1207-1273), a Persian Mystic, wrote a poem that complements St. Benedict's notion of hospitality.

The Guest House

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
Who violently sweep your house
Empty of its furniture,

Still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
For some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at the door laughing,
And invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.

"When You Care Enough to Send the Very Best, ..."

By Sister Mary Catherine Shambour



Sister Mary Catherine Shambour,
Director of Vocation Ministry

When Jesus reminded His hearers that "... the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light," (Luke 16:8) what comes to mind are the shrewd entrepreneurs who know what lies at the core of every human heart: the desire to love and be loved. They know that by plucking that universal heartstring, the gift seeker will strive to demonstrate his or her love by choosing the more costly gift or the \$3.95 card vs. the 99 cent one. We've all been there, mostly at Christmas-shopping time, experiencing not a little sadness that we can't give more to those we love.

When I was a young religious—in the days before Sisters could receive a monthly stipend—the one ache that really tore at my heart was that I could never in a tangible way express my love for my parents who had sacrificed so much for me, had given me my education and everything. I had to write to request bus fare to visit them! The heartache was in some way reciprocal, for there were just so many white handkerchiefs or boxes of candy one could use or share with the community. But over time we both learned that it was our love for each other that really mattered, and my parents came to realize that the gift of self I had given to God had come back in many ways to them as well as to me. Love does such things.

As much as we may deplore the commercialization of Christmas, it is one time in the year when we try to give of ourselves to others, though we may have forgotten the original reason: "We, for our part, love because He first loved us," (1 John: 4:19) and the very best gift that God, Who is Love, sent and keeps sending us is His beloved Son. Those who ponder this mystery are moved to return love for Love, and some—through an undeserved gift of God—are moved to give all for All.

Today the Holy Spirit is very much at work among a significant number of young men and women who have been touched by God and wish to devote their entire lives to loving God and serving others. I challenge them as they, with their empty pockets and overflowing hearts, come to worship the God who cared enough "to send the very best" and to see the helpless, humble child who emptied Himself of everything to be their gift. I challenge them to respond by likewise giving all they have to give—themselves—to Him in return. True lovers won't settle for less. Kneeling before the crib, material gifts lose their significance as heart speaks to heart.

In vocation ministry we recognize that the overwhelming reason men and women even begin to consider that God may be calling them to religious life is that someone suggested to them that possibility. As you read this article, ask yourself if you have ever considered that God could be calling you to give the gift of yourself in religious life. If you have single sons and daughters or grandchildren, have you ever asked them if they have considered priesthood or religious life? They may be honored by your question and truly find that they "care enough" to give God the "very best."

Photo by Kathy Laplante

Sister Profile: Sister Mary E. Penrose

By Sister Linda Wiggins



Photo by Andy Therrien



When I posed the question “What advice would you give a woman who is interested in entering the religious life,” Sister Mary E. (Romanus) Penrose tossed her head back and declared quite firmly, “I would tell her to Go For It. Life is nothing if you do not Dare and Do.” This author of two books, including *Refreshing Water From Ancient Wells*, which has recently been published in Lithuanian, and numerous articles and reviews for religious periodicals, obviously follows her own advice.

In fact, she has been writing in one form or another since she was a small child: “I began with writing jingles for my elementary school friends for their birthdays or just for fun. When I was in high school, I wrote poems for my mother and edited and wrote for a small school paper a classmate and I put together after school.” Throughout college she had ample opportunity to write; for example, she holds an M.A. in Sacred Doctrine—Scripture and Theology from St. Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana. After her perpetual profession in 1951, she worked as a high school teacher, an aspirant director, a vocation director, an editor of several publications, and was listed in *The American Catholic’s Who’s Who*, vol. XVI.

Today, Sister Mary E. freelance writes, edits, and reviews religious studies’ articles, plans liturgies for Monastery prayer services and Eucharist, and regularly tutors our African Sisters, Gotharda Nyoni, Valentina Pilla, and Paracleta Ezema, in their written English. All are students at The College of St. Scholastica. She especially enjoys working with students in a one-to-one collaborative. When I questioned her about what she would like to be asked, she replied, “What gives you a great sense of satisfaction beyond writing?” Her answer? “Working with the African students.” She finds absolute joy in seeing them progress in their written work until they are able to express themselves accurately. Another African Sister, Sister Gaudensia, will be arriving in December, and Sister Mary E. is eagerly looking forward to knowing and working with her.

Sister cantors on occasion at Eucharist and sings in the Sisters’ Schola. A perfectionist (her own admission), a quiet, soft-spoken woman with very definite likes and dislikes, she wastes no time in idle moments. On the computer in her office are posted two adages she lives by: (a) “Writing is very easy—all you have to do is get in front of a typewriter until little drops of blood appear on your forehead” (Red Smith), and (b) “The most important thing a writer needs is a goal of perseverance that takes one by the seat of one’s pants to the seat of one’s chair” (Leon Uris).

Research looms at the top of the list of what she finds most rewarding; she has completed extensive research on the Church Fathers and Mothers. She loves research, in part, because it combines her two favorite subjects: history and literature. She still mulls over the idea of compiling a work on Church Fathers. She has already quite a file of researched material on them. Another fine achievement she found most rewarding was receiving 25 awards from the National Catholic Press Association for her work as editor of the publication *Spirit and Life* during her 18 years of service.

When I pressed her about her own religious philosophy, Sister Mary E. quietly stated: “As many of the great spiritual writers, e.g. St. Bernard, Teresa of Avila, have said, ‘The first step in having spirituality is self-knowledge.’ I have tried to follow this pathway all my life.”



Holy Name Reception



October 9, 2006, we hosted a reception for family and friends at Holy Name of Jesus Church in Wayzata. Over 75 people attended and were greeted by ten Sisters from St. Scholastica Monastery. We enjoyed visiting with former students from Holy Name, family members, and long-time friends. Sister Lois was especially pleased to host the celebration in her home parish!

