

# Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF

ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

## Sister Melissa Cote Makes Perpetual Monastic Profession

Amid the smiles and prayers of her community of Benedictine sisters, family and friends, Sister Melissa Cote made perpetual monastic profession as a member of Annunciation Monastery during a Eucharistic liturgy June 17.

Sister Melissa, 28, a native of Rolla, ND, became familiar with the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery while she was a student at the University of Mary. Whenever she saw them, whether in the cafeteria or at an event, she says there was something that drew her to them. "I saw in them such a devotion to God and to each other," she recalls. Sister Melissa wondered if she might have a call to religious life. "When I mentioned to my mother that I might be interested in becoming a sister, she suggested that I talk to one of the sisters first and

get to know more about it." That was the start of what has become a decision of a lifetime.

Sister Melissa enjoys watching and playing sports, cards and board games. She also enjoys a good movie or book. "People tend to think you lose your freedom when you enter into religious life," says Sister Melissa. "The truth is, I have always been encouraged to see my family and friends outside of the monastery."

"I feel very excited about making my monastic profession as well as a real sense of gratitude for the sisters and the people who have helped me follow this path." Sister Melissa serves at St. Alexius Medical Center's Inpatient Pharmacy as a registered pharmacy technician and continues her studies in pharmacy.



Lt. to rt.: Sister Susan Lardy, director of sisters in first profession, Sister Melissa Cote and Sister Susan Berger, prioress

Lt. to rt: Sisters Susan Berger, Susan Lardy, Melissa Cote and Father Daniel Maloney. Sister Melissa Cote receives the ring signifying her commitment.



## MESSAGE FROM THE *Prioress*



### *Prayer Presence on the Prairie*

For more than 128 years, we Benedictine sisters of Annunciation Monastery have lived with the people of western North Dakota. We first came in the late 1800s to teach children and to care for the sick. We stayed and our community flourished. So did our ministries of education and health care.

*“You are a sacred part of our lives.”*

Today, 2006, we are committed to the people, and we continue to be earnest in furthering the mission of Jesus through education and health care. We pray for the people of God three times each day in community prayer and in our private prayer.

Years ago when we had more sisters, we were the majority of the teachers in the Catholic schools where we taught. We were also the majority of the nurses on the floors in the hospitals. The numbers may look different now, but the mission grows stronger and deeper. God continues to call women to this life, and we continue exploring ways to be present in new and different ways.

The changing times call for new responses in education and health care. It is our tradition, as sisters of Annunciation Monastery, to also change with the times and respond creatively. One thing that has not changed is our love for the people and our commitment to you. You are a sacred part of our lives.

Currently, we sisters are laying the foundation for a development program which will assist us in finding new ways to deepen our commitment to our ministries and to the future. We have always collaborated with you, our friends, to carry on the Benedictine

tradition. We will be asking you to collaborate with us in our mission even more deeply into the future, vibrant and holy.

Through our stories in our newsletters, we share how we respond to the needs of the people. We pray that in sharing our stories of faith, you will see the difference you too are making

in the lives of others as you tell your own stories. People today are experiencing a deep spiritual hunger that can be nourished by Benedictine values. Our world seeks the values that Benedict proposed for community in his rule written over 1500 years ago, values like community, prayer, stewardship, healing presence, and respect for persons.

As the bell banner tolls from the hill above Annunciation Monastery, rest assured that our hearts and our doors are always open to you.

We pray that the light of Christ will continue to shine on you and your family as we travel this journey of faith together.

Sister Susan Berger, OSB

*May you and your loved ones be favored by God's Holy One with peace, joy and love during this Holy season and always.*

*Design by: Edith Selzler, OSB of Annunciation Monastery*



# New Psalm Books: Labor of Love

It was a 10-year labor of love. Breathing a sigh of relief, Sister Rebecca Mayer handed over the last issue of new prayer books for the community of Annunciation Monastery.

Sister Rebecca chaired the community worship committee responsible for creating 10 volumes

of books for the sisters' morning, noon and evening prayer called the Liturgy of the

Hours. This prayer of the Church is one of the sisters' most important ministries — to pray for people everywhere.

Developing new prayer books was a major undertaking involving serious study and attention to the Psalms and Scripture as well as an understanding of theology, language, chant and music composition.

The project became a labor of love for Sister Rebecca and the worship committee. Approximately five years were spent reviewing prayer books from other communities, researching articles and books, and studying the impact of language translation in prayer.

One of Sister Rebecca's tasks involved reading the Gospel for each Sunday and feastday and letting it seep into her soul before writing the text on staff paper and composing the music on the keyboard. Her inspiration for writing the antiphons for each morning and evening prayer comes from the Bible. "The Gospel inspires me when I'm composing because certain words or phrases will jump out at me and I know that's what should be emphasized," she says.

Once satisfied with the text and music, Sister Rebecca brought her work to the committee members for fine tuning. Committee members include: Sisters Susan Berger, Agatha Muggli, Moireen Kelly, Edith Selzler, Mary Elizabeth Mason, Patricia Schap, Miriam Schmitt, Susan Lardy, Martha Jane Bonine.

"This committee was critical for the success of completing these books," says Sister Rebecca.

The various sisters offered their knowledge of scripture, liturgy, art, music, language and ease of use for both sisters and the "people in the pew." "The Psalms are powerful in our daily

prayers because they include the full range of honest human experience - the glad, the sad, and the mad

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Sister Margaret Nelson expresses her enthusiasm for the new Psalm books, "We are so blessed to have these beautiful and inspirational books; and everything can be found within one book during prayer." Sister Mary Walker says, "I appreciate the tremendous amount of love, labor, commitment and prayer that went into creating these Psalm books; from the elegant covers designed by Sister Edith, to the print which is easy to read, to the beautiful ribbons that mark the pages. They are enriching to pray from."

This 10-year labor of love will serve the sisters and guests of the monastery for years to come.

*Sister Rebecca displays new prayer books.*





# Annunciation Monastery Offers Spiritual Direction

The Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery invite people who are interested in seeking a deeper relationship with God to consider spiritual direction. Several sisters of Annunciation Monastery are certified spiritual directors and are available to take appointments.

Spiritual direction is a relationship in which individuals freely invite a spiritual director to assist them in developing a closer relationship with God. The focus of spiritual direction is always on God and how God works in the life and relationships of the individual. A spiritual director listens deeply and helps one listen to the movement of the Spirit within and find answers to questions within one's heart.

Kathy Perrin has participated in spiritual direction and has gone through a two-year certification process to become a certified spiritual director herself. Below is an interview with Perrin about her experience with spiritual direction.

## How did you become familiar with spiritual direction?

"I've known the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery for many years and I was at a point where I knew I was searching for something in my life. I think for some people, we can feel basically happy but for some reason there's a void — something that is blocking us from pure joy. We can be surrounded by supportive and loving relationships but still feel alone. There seems to be something in people's lives that prevents their ability to do their best. This is what attracted me to spiritual direction. It was an opportunity to discover what was blocking me. Through spiritual direction we learn the skills to fill the void with a relationship with God which is ultimately the only thing that will complete us."

## How can spiritual direction improve one's life?

"As humans, we want to protect ourselves from things that cause us suffering. Spiritual direction gently explores those areas or life circumstances that can steal our soul and our joy. It takes away the fear and anxiety and helps one explore them in a safe, God-filled environment. The recognition of our inner light, energy, peace and joy can allow us to regain that control by discovering the joy God wants us to have. But, like everything, we have to WANT to regain control. We may sometimes feel

it's just easier to be controlled by the pain and fear and continue living in that darkness. I think God wants us to recognize the light in the darkness, the blessing in the suffering. The spiritual growth and the knowledge of self and God are priceless. It's an ongoing journey."



Kathy Perrin, Ph.D., CSD, FAOTA - view from Annunciation Monastery.

## Why did you decide to become certified in spiritual direction?

"I am passionate about helping others embrace a relationship with God that allows them to recognize the positive energy and peace that God offers. I believe the climate is such that people are seeking spiritual enrichment. The two-year certification program, called the Emmaus Program was sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery (Bismarck) and Sacred Heart Monastery (Richardton, ND), and St. Scholastica Monastery (Duluth, MN). Sister Jean Maher of St. Scholastica directed the program. It involved self-reflection, research, journaling, prayer, confidentiality/ethics, meditation and periods of silence."

## What is the greatest benefit you received from spiritual direction?

"I found spiritual direction so powerful because I learned to be mindful and grateful for the Divine Presence that surrounds us each day. It is a blessing to be aware of that gift, the awareness that opens us to God and feeling more connected to God. I value the opportunity to be guided to reflect on things I may not have uncovered on my own. Spiritual direction reminds us that we're never alone. There is never a time when God doesn't care about us. God does not abandon us. There's beauty in the darkness because as we journey to the truth, light unfolds."

For more information about Annunciation Monastery's spiritual direction program, contact Sister Gemma Peters at (701)255-1520.

# HOSPICE: A FINAL GIFT

by Mary Elizabeth Mason, OSB

In the year 2000, when I returned from the Marshall Islands to a spanking new monastery where I had no responsibilities (in monastic terms, no “charges”), I hoped to fulfill a long-held dream: involvement in prison ministry. Eventually, however, various bureaucratic entanglements made this well-nigh impossible. Therefore, in 2001, I surveyed other options and selected orientation for hospice ministry as a volunteer at St. Alexius. Among my classmates was Sister Claire Schmitt.

We learned much about the history, purpose, and spirit of Dr. Cicely Saunders, who began medical studies in her thirties in order to improve end-of-life care, a field that was largely ignored. From agnostic and atheist, Saunders eventually became a believer; her insights, coupled with hard work, have brought immeasurable mercies to the dying for more than sixty years. Her approach is akin to that of medieval monastics; indeed she early worked with the Irish Sisters of Charity in East London before preparing to found her famed St. Christopher's Hospice in 1969.

The most helpful part of my preparation came from other volunteers and from the fine people in our local program, who remain my friends and

mentors. What has been hardest is the brevity of my involvement in many of the situations where I served. By far the most rewarding was one that lasted almost six months in 2004, yet in a way is still happening because of my friendship with the Lynch family.

Mary Jane Gallagher, suffering from inoperable cancer, left California when Ann and Jack Lynch, her daughter and son-in-law, lovingly welcomed her into their Bismarck home for hospice care. The ministers of their local church, First Presbyterian, also extended a warm welcome by simply adopting this lifelong Methodist as a member. The two ministers' regular pastoral visits evidenced the spirit of Christ; their care was to culminate some months later in the ritual of an autumn funeral service at the church for the gathered family and their many friends.

Mary Jane was a delightful person, and our sharings ranged as widely as her many interests—from the history of her rug-making, to her married life, to thoughts on pain and death and Jesus and heaven. She missed the beauty of the Pacific; but loved every detail in Ann's home. Above all, she was overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness of Ann and Jack. All the hospice



Sister Mary Elizabeth Mason reminisces with Jack and Ann Lynch.

caregivers won her affection too, for their gentle expertise and readiness to respond. She was often concerned that Ann was overdoing; and because the Hospice staff had the same concern, they arranged for weekend hospitalization to give the family respite.

We enjoyed playing at housekeeping when we prepared meals in Ann's kitchen; too, we played games or relaxed on the sun porch till she grew too weak. Some of our conversations touched on Charlie Rose and other Public Television programs, as well as ideas and hopes and loves we shared. Mary Jane did not seem afraid of dying so much as of dying too slowly, thus wearying her beloved Ann.

When God gently called Mary Jane to eternity, all of us who loved her grieved, of course; but we continue to stay in touch with our dear one and with one another, aware that love, like all that is good, can never end. I pray that many more people may at the end experience what Cicely Saunders made possible.

To make a donation, please use the enclosed envelope. Thank you.

Please remember us when making or revising your will. Our legal name is: Benedictine Sisters of the Annunciation, B.M.V.

For more information, contact Jill Ackerman, director of communications and development, at (701) 355-8907 or email: [jill@annunciationmonastery.org](mailto:jill@annunciationmonastery.org)

## *Congratulations on your Graduation, Sister Nicole!*

Sister Nicole Kunze received a Doctor of Philosophy degree in chemical education from the University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colo., at commencement ceremonies held May 5. At graduation, she was presented with the Graduate Dean's Citation for Outstanding Dissertation and gave the welcome address at commencement.

Several sisters attended the graduation ceremonies to celebrate with her. Sister Nicole returned home with a heart full of gratitude for the

support she received from the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery while she was away at school.

Sister Nicole currently serves as assistant professor of chemistry at the University of Mary, Bismarck. She says, "Sometimes I have to pinch myself to make sure this is real, because this is something I have always aspired to do. I want to be the best teacher I can be."

Sister Nicole is the daughter of Allen and Marilyn Kunze of Oriska, ND.



Back row, lt. to rt.: Sisters Margaret Nelson, Melissa Cote, Nicole Kunze, Agatha Muggli.

Front row, lt. to rt.: Sisters Denise Ressler, Janet Zander, Stephanie Dolyniuk

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## *Sister Kathleen Becomes Adjunct Faculty Member*

Sister Kathleen Atkinson has become an adjunct faculty member for the Institute of Lifelong Faith Formation of the National Center for Ministry Development, Naugatuck, CT. With a specialty in

intergenerational faith formation, Sister Kathleen served on a team for a conference in Detroit, MI, in July 2006 and will teach in Boston, MA, the summer of 2007.



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## *Newly Certified Spiritual Directors*

Twelve men and women, of varied religious and professional backgrounds, became certified spiritual directors this year through the Emmaus Program. They are: Back row, lt. to rt.: Donnavée Schneider, Mott; Kim Peterson, Minot; Karen Dvirnak, Killdeer; Zanne Ness, Bismarck; Kathy Perrin, Mandan; and Dorothy Renner, Dickinson. Front row, lt. to rt.: Sister Colette Wolf, OSB, Sacred Heart Monastery, Richardton; Cheryl Hansen, Bismarck; Steve Streitz, Minot; Carol Kitco, Bismarck; and Sister Julie Brandt, SSND, Mankato, MN. (Not pictured: Marie Gabel, Bismarck)





# We Love Our Volunteers!

We'd like to show our deep appreciation to our dedicated volunteers, Mary Wilson and Janet von Ruden. They are truly our sisters, in Christ! Mary and Janet faithfully cover the front desk at Annunciation Monastery — greeting visitors, answering the switchboard and doing a variety of tasks. In visiting with them, it's obvious the sisters and volunteers benefit mutually from each other!

**Mary Wilson** - Mary was recently retired and wanted to contribute to something meaningful when a friend suggested she volunteer at Annunciation Monastery. Mary says Sister Ruth Margaret Karabensh took her under her wing. "We are such good friends and now I try to come out early for my shift so we can have a cup of coffee and visit before I go to work."



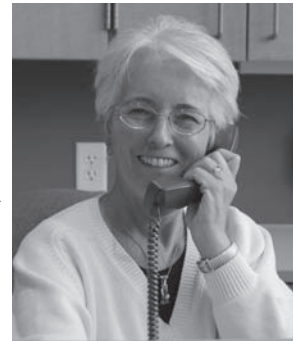
*Sister Moireen Kelly admires the handiwork of volunteer Mary Wilson.*

Mary says she finds spending time at the monastery calming and life-giving. She finds conversations with the sisters uplifting. The sisters delight in exchanging crafting and needlework ideas with her.

Mary marvels at how the sisters have welcomed her. "It's a moving experience to be so accepted, without judgment. I always leave thinking, 'Thank you, Lord, for letting me be here.' There's just something about being here that feels so good!"

**Janet von Ruden** - Janet's church bulletin caught her eye when she read about the sisters' need for volunteers. "I had kept it on my kitchen counter for so long and realized, there must be a reason I hadn't thrown it away, says Janet. She made the call and has been a volunteer for over a year.

"I love visiting with the sisters," says Janet. "Their smiles and hospitality brighten my day and I enjoy the peaceful environment at the monastery." She also manages to catch up on some of her embroidery projects and reading while volunteering.



*Volunteer Janet von Ruden greets callers at the switchboard.*

Heartfelt thanks and prayers go out to these wonderful ladies, who offer their gifts of time, talent and friendship!

## In Loving Memory of

### *Sister Clement Funk*

*June 30, 1912 - June 28, 2006*

Sister Clement was an excellent teacher and in her gentle way impacted the lives of hundreds of students over a 50 year span. Her deep faith in God was a special joy for her as praying the Liturgy of the Hours and attending the Eucharist. She had global vision, often during the Eucharist she would pray for a social justice intention.



### *Sister Pauline Ehlis*

*August 29, 1915 - July 9, 2006*

Sister Pauline had a rewarding career as an instructor and administrator in schools in Dickinson, Mandan and Bismarck. After her 1994 retirement, Sister Pauline produced fine handiwork for the monastery's gift shop and assisted in the monastery's archives. She had a dry sense of humor and the ability to laugh at herself. She enjoyed people and had a special love for her family.



# Welcome Mady and Hannah!



Postulant Mady Louttit

Annunciation Monastery sisters received two new women as postulants. Postulancy is the second step in the process of becoming a full member of the monastic community. This stage involves the women moving into the monastery to participate more fully in community life, prayer, study and ministry.

The ceremony of becoming a postulant is rich in Benedictine tradition. The women arrive at the front door of the monastery, suitcase in hand, and knock upon the door. Prioress Sister Susan Berger addresses them by name, asking, "What do you seek?" Each woman answers and indicates a desire to deepen her relationship with God within the monastic community. During the ceremony, the women are shown to their rooms in the monastery. They are then led to chapel for Evening Praise followed by a celebration with an evening meal. Warm hugs and welcomes follow this blessed event.

Mady Louttit became a postulant on Aug. 13. She earned her MA in theology from the Seminary of the Immaculate Conception in Huntington,

Long Island, NY. Mady works in various ministries at the monastery and assists with theology classes at the University of Mary and in the monastery development office.

Hannah Vanorny became a postulant on Nov. 26. She graduated from North Dakota State University with a MA in history and works at the North Dakota State Library. Hannah is from Oakes, ND.

Please join us in praying for our women in initial formation.



Prioress Sister Susan Berger welcomes Hannah Vanorny with Sister JoAnn Krebsbach.

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