

Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF

ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

WINTER 2006

www.annunciationmonastery.org

BENEDICT

Benedict, Benedict
Your ladder looms tall
as does your life.
You step down in exaltation
Keeping your thoughts
present to God
and not to yourself.
"Likewise from afar you know my thoughts."

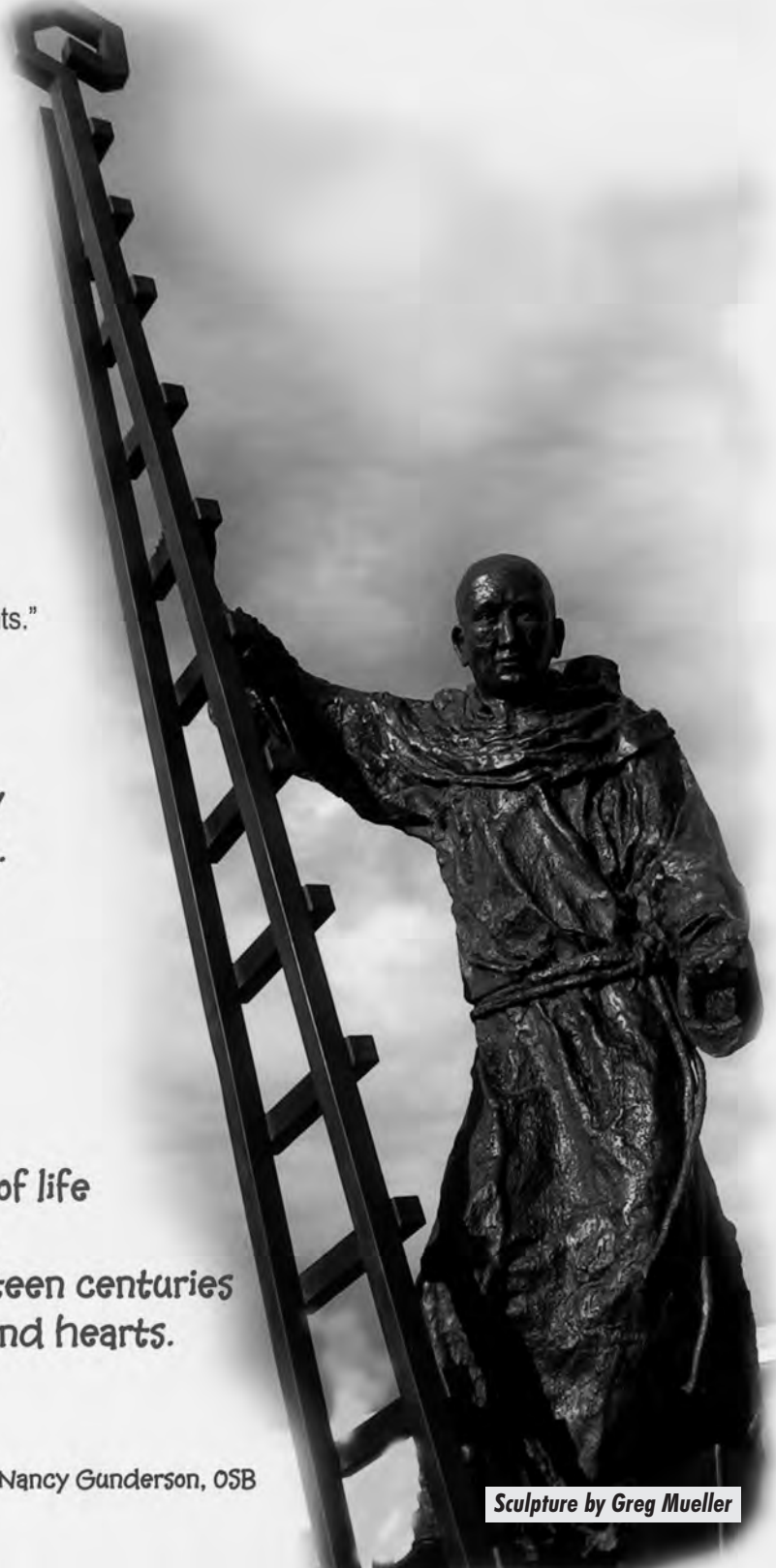
You reach up hanging on
to the common rule,
your belief in community
and the common good.

You reach out inviting all
to come and embark upon
this way of peace.

Benedict, Benedict,
We strive to live this way of life
certain of its rightness.
The age old call beyond fifteen centuries
still echoes in our ears and hearts.
"Come follow Me."

Sr. Nancy Gunderson, OSB

Sculpture by Greg Mueller



MESSAGE FROM THE Prioress



WE HAVE celebrated a wondrous event of a young woman who said yes to God and gave birth to the Savior of the world. We never tire of recounting the Christmas story. We are intrigued that it was a humble stable and ordinary people, Mary, Joseph and shepherds, who welcomed the Son of God, an infant child. Words will never express completely our awe, gratitude, and wonder at this extraordinary mystery.

In this issue of *Tidings*, members of our community express what is significant about some of the values that undergird our Benedictine way of life such as community, prayer and hospitality. We are intrigued that such ordinary values carry such significance in our day and throughout the centuries of human history.

Just as God worked with the coming of His Son in ordinary ways – a stable, a child, and shepherds; we continue to experience God's extraordinary love through what is most human and simple, love that is present in the daily events of our lives. God works in the routine, through the ordinary, in what is right at hand.

For Benedict, it is not important what one does, whether one is a librarian, switchboard operator, scholar, gardener, cook, CEO, night watchman, a Benedictine, single or married. What is important for Benedict is that we strive to live in ways that bring us closer to God and one another.

We pray that by living in such a manner, we will have an influence on our world in small and large ways — in our families, cities, churches, schools and businesses. Indeed if we wish to save the very earth on which we live, if peace is to survive at all, we need to be faithful to the values taught by Jesus Christ, Benedict, and many others.

We want to thank you for your compassion which has touched our lives in recent months. Many of you know that Sister Susan Lardy and Sister Mariah Dietz were in a tragic car accident on November 19. Sister Mariah is well and is healing in her heart. Sister Susan is back in Bismarck from an extended stay at St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester, Minn. She continues to recover here at our monastery. Sister Susan and Sister Mariah and our community marvel at the outpouring of your love and prayer at this time. Through ordinary cards and words of compassion, you shared an extraordinary love which radiated farther than Annunciation Monastery or St. Mary's Hospital in Rochester. How far, we will never know. That it did, we believe and we are deeply grateful.

May you experience God's presence and love throughout this New Year!

Sister Susan Berger, OSB

To donate to the ongoing education of our new members and their formation in Benedictine monastic values, 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. Thank you.

Why Are Benedictine Values So Important?

BENEDICTINE values. What are they? How do we live them out each day? Are they relevant in today's world? While St. Benedict lived in sixth century Italy (c. 480-547), his Rule still serves as a guide for living for Benedictines today. His teachings may be enigmatic for people unfamiliar with The Rule of St. Benedict. However, the principles are as pertinent and timely for modern, peaceful living as is the "golden rule," to treat others as we wish to be treated. Benedict encourages, "let all be received as Christ."

The Rule of Benedict withstands the test of time and its directives are used directly or indirectly in

business, schools, family life — almost any secular setting. It's bigger than a group of men or women who live by it in monastic communities and it is flexible enough to adapt to the changing times. The Rule gives a sense of order and moderation to life, encouraging a balance of private prayer and communal prayer, of work and rest.

The Sisters of Annunciation Monastery were asked to comment on a specific value that is most near and dear to them. While all Benedictine values are embraced by the sisters, here are their thoughts on some of them. In their commitment to these values, may some of our questions be answered.

Community

ITHINK I took community for granted when I was living with the sisters day in and day out. Being away at graduate school the past five years has been tough. Each time I come home, I realize how supportive the sisters are of me and each other. I miss the little things about community the most, like visits at table, in the hallway, or on a walk. Modern conveniences like e-mail help us keep in touch, but it's not the same as being home and experiencing community.



Sister Nicole Kunze

Mindful of the Poor

JESUS said, "What you do to the least of my little ones, you do unto me." So, I knit and crochet afghans and baby blankets for the needy, and make mission rosaries for anyone in need. I have been knitting and crocheting for over 30 years and making rosaries for five years.



Sister Ralphine Fried

Presence

NOW, some years ago, for Lent, I chose PRESENCE as my value on which to concentrate. God's active presence is revealed in human experience; in relationships, in diversity, in mysticism, in a listening heart which is the greatest form of loving. Presence is often referred to in the Psalms, in Scripture, in spiritual writings — yes, even in a glorious North Dakota sunrise, in the title of a magazine, or in the smile of an infant. These become God's initiative and my response brings availability to others, transforming me, a pilgrim on my way to God.



Sister Kathryn Zimmer

Hospitality

THE Benedictine practice of hospitality has been a key to wholeness of life for more than 1500 years. Our doors are always open to guests. The sisters host women wanting to learn more about monastic life and extend our warm, welcome spirit to our employees. I have fond memories of the 12 years I served as a guest coordinator at the monastery. The Benedictine spirit comes alive in hospitality that opens our hearts to the world.



Sister Mary Ann Welder

Values Dear to the Sisters' Hearts

Liturgy of the Hours

MY FAVORITE Benedictine value is Liturgy of the Hours because it is filled with Psalms. Psalms have the power to bring us into the presence of God in a special way. Many of the Psalms are overflowing with joy and praise of God's goodness; others are filled with sorrow and lamentation, and others a sense of repentance and contrition. There are Psalms for all our moods and circumstances.



Sister Delora Schweitzer

Moderation

AMONG the Benedictine values I have no favorite, but I cherish the words of Bernard of Clairvaux regarding moderation. The saint was well aware that *virtus stat in medio*: each and every virtue is midway between two vices. (For example, excessive hope is rashness and deficient hope is despair.) The sole exception is love for God; as Bernard writes, "The measure for loving God is to love without measure," (*De Diligendo Deo*, I). Like Benedict, may we always seek moderation, but not in our love for God!



Sister Mary Elizabeth Mason

Obedience

OBEDIENCE is my favorite value because we live by it. In 1941, I vowed obedience according to the Rule of St. Benedict. The first degree of humility is obedience without delay. The Lord says of those, "As soon as he heard, he obeyed Me," and "He who hears you, hears Me." With the ready step of obedience, they follow the voice of authority in their actions. The disciple, out of reverence for God, abandons his own will and follows the voice of authority.



Sister Louista Eckroth

Listening

MY FAVORITE Benedictine value is listening. The first words of the Rule are "Listen carefully." Benedict does not say just to listen but to listen carefully. That tells me listening is of primary importance to one seeking God and following the Rule of Benedict. It says in the Rule that speaking and teaching are the master's task and the disciple is to be silent and listen. Benedict speaks of not only listening to words but listening "with the ear of your heart." It is more than hearing words. It means listening at a deeper level where one is in tune with one's own heart and what is being heard in one's inner being. It is about hearing what a situation demands of us and then responding to it (obedience). It is about hearing the heart of a brother or sister standing right in front of us.



Sister Nancy Gunderson

Hospitality

I LOVE people and have committed myself to something greater than myself. I am most grateful for my ministry at St. Alexius Medical Center where I am hospitality hostess. I strive to welcome strangers, friends, rich and poor alike, in a compassionate, friendly manner. Greeting people with a smile and a "Hello" is a road to bring Christ to others and provides me an opportunity to assist with their needs, whoever they may be. Openness to their needs builds relationships that, in many instances, provides lifetime friends and memories. Listening and understanding one another in a Christlike manner brings joy and closeness to God in many circumstances. People are often grateful for this sharing. To hear these voices of God brings great richness to my life, and a sense of thankfulness for the gift of hospitality. Sharing God's love, compassion and joy expresses to me, "That in all things, God may be glorified."



Sister Rita Miller

Prayer and Eucharist



Sister Rose Schweitzer



Sister Francis Schweitzer

PRAYER is so important in our lives. In our home it was the custom that morning and evening prayer and meal prayer were said together. In our day, we did not always have Mass on Sundays, but people from the parish would always come to church. Our dad would lead songs, rosary and litany. People prayed together and stayed together.

How Can I Choose?

VALUES are an integral part of the Rule of Benedict, essential for monastic life. This all encompassing concept of values permeates all our activities: prayer, work, meditation, Scripture/spiritual reading, our relationships within community, with family, friends, employees, guests and all we meet. Benedictine values are truly a treasury of grace, freedom and spiritual invitations to grow in love of God, the goal of every true monastic. How does one choose a favorite value?



Sister Bernadette Fisher

Respect for Persons

TO RESPECT and be kind to other people is important to me. I believe we need to accept the “whole” of each human being, including another’s gifts and limitations. With our support, people can be the best they can be without having to wear masks to cover up who they really are. When a person can be true to oneself, everyone benefits.



Sister Melissa Cote

Lectio Divina

ONE of my favorite Benedictine values is lectio divina, centered on biblical women. For the past several years, I have devoted considerable time and effort in reading, studying and pondering the Biblical women of both the Hebrew and New Testaments. Having been gifted with the responsibility of purchasing books for our monastic library, our present holdings on biblical women have increased considerably. Since the liturgical readings are rarely devoted to the role of biblical women, my own emphasis in focusing on their contribution as women prophets to spread God’s kingdom has profoundly enriched my scriptural lectio divina. Usually I have at least one book from which I try to ponder daily. Presently, I am pondering *Twelve Apostolic Women* by Joanne Turpin.



Sister Miriam Schmitt

Many Blessings Be Yours in 2006!

Sister Nancy Gunderson Delves into Novitiate

SISTER Nancy Gunderson became a novice of Annunciation Monastery in September.

The novitiate is a year of immersion into the monastic life and involves study, prayer and reflection. "It is dropping more deeply into an understanding of what our monastic charism is," explains Sister Nancy.

As a novice, Sister Nancy sees the sisters of Annunciation Monastery handing on their tradition, bringing her closer to God and the monastic community. "This year I hope to absorb the spirituality by living with these women who model it for me and through studying the masters and the tradition that is alive and well after 1500 years."

As part of her daily rhythm in the novitiate, Sister Nancy enjoys the richness of her prayer and community life. "This rhythm is very holistic and balanced," she explains, "and is designed to be the most balanced year of my life." She engages in work in the monastic library and the every day duties of doing dishes, cleaning the sacristy and other chores.

Sister Nancy's interest in Biblical women extends into a major undertaking she hopes to bring to fruition. She and Sister Miriam Schmitt are developing a new project called the Medieval Monastic Women Project (MMWP). They are preserving and maintaining Sister Miriam's 20 years



Sister Nancy Gunderson (center) holds Rule of St. Benedict which she will study during her novitiate. From left are Sister Agatha Muggli, novice director; Sister Susan Berger, prioress and Sister Janet Zander, postulant director.

of research and scholarship on medieval monastic women. The purpose is to make accessible this collection of books, papers, presentations, cassettes, pictures, slides, and music to scholars.

When asked about the many projects on her slate, Sister Nancy exudes a peaceful, yet energetic enthusiasm. "It may sound like a lot, but I don't feel overburdened," she said. "This is about giving yourself to the formation process and letting God form and reform us."

In Loving Memory of Sister Gwendolyn Pattock

October 7, 1911 - December 5, 2005



Sister Gwendolyn was a monastic attracted to divine goodness and beauty, finding it imaged in music, in flowers, and in the faces of children. A versatile and dedicated religious woman, she spent a half-century in pediatric nursing, chiefly at St. Alexius Medical Center, Bismarck. Later she served as a mental health consultant and director, then as assistant to the president of the University of Mary.

Her love of music, her playful spirit, and her devotion to Martin de Porres endeared her to the community. We gladly remember the endless joy awaiting her who so faithfully lived Jesus' promise, "Whoever welcomes a child for my sake welcomes me."

What We Are Hearing from Our Guests

EVERY monastery has a different charism, a way the sisters carry out their ministries, a certain personality in the way they pray and interact within community.

We've been curious about what our guests experience when they visit Annunciation Monastery, so we asked two of the women who have been spending time with us. We were so affirmed by their comments, we wanted to share them. Here is what we've heard.

Nelpha, a math professor from Boston (originally from the Philippines), commented that she was warmed by the hospitality she's been offered. "The sisters welcomed me and made me feel at home here by asking questions, sharing their lives with me and having a genuine interest in my life."

Mady, an applied behavior specialist from Manorville, NY, found the sisters happy to have the women visit. She feels the best part is being included in the community. "We are given chores,

invited to Mass and to sit with the sisters at meals and for social outings." She said there is no sense of being excluded.

"You are made to feel a part



Nelpha helps prepare potatoes for supper.

of the community and that is great because it gives you an idea of what life would really be like in this community."

One would think these women might find Bismarck, N.D., a little extreme compared to life in the big city. Mady said with a smile, "You look like Norman Rockwell America, it's wonderful!" They said the sisters wanted them to see and learn about North Dakota during their stay. They experienced friendliness and hospitality wherever they went, they said, at the monastery as well as the places they visited. Mady was quickly initiated into North Dakota living by riding on Annunciation Monastery's float in a parade in Garrison, N.D.



Sister Eleanor Stockert with guest Mady of New York.

"It was fun to see the people waving and shouting to us — they were so happy to see the sisters in the parade." Both women joined some of the sisters in Medora, N.D., where they took in the beautiful Badlands and the Medora Musical.

The women enjoyed the monastery's expansive view of the bluffs and valleys along the Missouri River. Taking advantage of the walking paths, they found the grounds to be beautifully kept. They also emphasized the richness of the prayer life of the sisters.

"You are made to feel a part of the community and that is great because it gives you an idea of what life would really be like in this community."

"I find the monastery to be a place of prayer and peace, a peace that is not forced but is respectful and comfortable," said Mady.

"There is warmth, laughter and always interesting conversation," added Nelpha.

Please join the sisters in praying for those discerning a call to religious life and our women in religious formation. If you are interested in learning more about monastic life at Annunciation Monastery, contact Sister Kathleen Atkinson at (701)255-1520 or email:

vocations@annunciationmonastery.org

Sisters Surprised by Awards

Sister Miriam Schmitt was honored at a meeting of the Monastic Liturgy Forum for her years of service as a member of the steering committee of the liturgy forum. Her certificate reads: "Through sharing of her knowledge, time, and love of liturgy, she helped to enrich the prayer life of monastic communities in North and Central America."



Sister Miriam Schmitt

Sister Thomas Welder was inducted into the St. Mary's Central High School Hall of Fame at the school's 2005



Induction Banquet. **Sister Thomas Welder** A 1958 graduate, Sister Thomas was recognized as a "beacon of Catholic School leadership in Bismarck."



Sister Mary Ann Welder was surprised by University of Mary staff and students when she was presented the University of Mary Varsity Club "Lifetime Fan Award" for her committed and enthusiastic support of Marauder athletes and sports. From left is football coach Myron Schultz, Sister Mary Ann and women's basketball coach Fred Fridley.

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