

SUMMER 2007

# Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF

ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

## Sister Nancy Gunderson Makes First Monastic Profession

"This community is a gift and a blessing," remarked Sister Nancy Gunderson following the ceremony of her first monastic profession Feb. 10, on the Feast of St. Scholastica. This step takes her closer to becoming a full member of the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery.

Before requesting to make first profession, Sister Nancy fulfilled the required year of novitiate, a year of intense immersion into monastic life and study of the Rule of St. Benedict. The Sisters are committed to supporting her in her search for God and in service to God's people.

During the ceremony, Sister Nancy was asked the question, "What do you seek?" Her response, "I seek God by being obedient and by being faithful to the monastic journey together with you."



Sister Nancy Gunderson signs profession document  
with Prioress Sister Susan Berger

A silver pin, bearing the image of the bell banner, was presented to Sister Nancy symbolizing her commitment to Annunciation Monastery. She chose a reading for the ceremony that speaks to her about this journey. Her chosen verse was "*that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete,*" (John 15:9-17) Sister Nancy felt she touched into that joy. "The beauty of the feast

day liturgy for the Feast of St. Scholastica touched me deeply," she explains. "It spoke of sentiments my own heart echoes."

With a sense of peacefulness, happiness, excitement and a sense of rightness about this community, Sister Nancy looks forward to her next step in ministry in service to God and the community.

## MESSAGE FROM THE *Prioress*

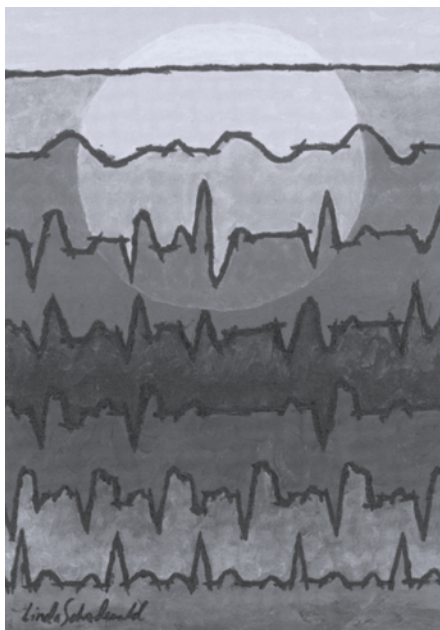


### *Prayerful Presence on the Prairie*

For many years, my sister, Linda, has drawn and colored mandalas. Mandalas are usually circular designs and can be found across all cultures from the earliest times to the present. I don't know where or how Linda created all of her mandalas. Somewhere deep inside, I think.

One of her mandalas holds particular meaning for our family. It symbolizes her grief at the time of our mother's death, that deep, cutting grief-impossible to put into words. Sometimes art can stir the soul and we whisper, "That's how it is!" Linda's "*Coming Full Circle*" invites that kind of knowing. She painted the mandala with oil paints, creating the design from the strips of paper that recorded our mother's heart rhythms during the last minutes of her life.

The colors begin at the bottom and work themselves upward. The first color is the kind of green we see now on the Dakota prairie where abundant rain has given birth to a rainbow of greens. The colors move from the green of life to



*"Coming Full Circle"*

dark, dense, murky purples, blues, reds and oranges, gradually becoming lighter oranges and yellows. A circle rests within the orange and yellow colors in a circle of light. On the back of the mandala, Linda writes, "In '*Coming Full Circle*' the person who dies comes into the fullness of life, leaving one dimension of life to enter a far better one." With death, all colors of our lives change into translucent hues of light and life.

In our community, seven of our beloved sisters have died within

three months. Every life and death is significant, always. But these months, we experienced these sisters' deaths and lives especially deeply. Six of the seven sisters were members of the 140 pioneering women who founded Annunciation Monastery in 1947. One of these seven sisters was 33 years younger than the oldest, at 103.

Each funeral was special, reflecting the uniqueness of each sister. Their families, friends, and our sisters shared stories about teaching, fishing, peeling potatoes, collecting Native American artifacts, growing flowers, baking bread, making the best homemade divinity, creating art, faithfulness to prayer and community, living with faith and courage — each woman unique, with gifts she gave generously wherever she lived and ministered. These gifts taught children, created homes and supported community. They were wonderful women. I think we came to love them even more. They each had come full circle, from birth – to life - to death – to eternal life.

At the same time our seven sisters completed their full circle, we sent you our first appeal letter, sharing our excitement about the new life in our community – three women who are in various stages of joining our community. During these months, these women have listened intently to the stories that were told about the seven elders. They believe that they are beginning to create their own stories. We believe this also. We are coming to know them as women who seek God, desire to learn more about the Eucharist and our

daily community prayer. They witness how we sign up for chores that keep our community running smoothly and they take their turns. They are becoming acquainted with our sponsored ministries so they too, can become a part of them – University of Mary, St. Alexius Medical Center and Garrison Memorial Hospital. These women are mindful of the church and the people of God across the world.

These women, and all of us at Annunciation Monastery, thank you for the prayer and monetary

gifts you have given, supporting our ministries. We are deeply grateful for your response and interest in helping us further the mission of Jesus.

*“Listen and attend with the ear of your heart,”* advises St. Benedict in his rule. Mandalas, lives well-lived, grieving and rejoicing, the old and the new, all invite us to not only listen, but to listen with the ear of our hearts. That kind of listening – careful, with awareness and gratitude – gradually creates pieces of the circle that one day will become our full circle.

## **CALLED TO** *Medjugorje*



Sister Denise stands on Apparition Hill, site of the Blessed Mother's first appearance to the children on June 24, 1981.

Medjugorje....even its name evokes images of mystery and holiness. Located in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Medjugorje is the place where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to six children on June 24, 1981. Since that time, pilgrims have been drawn there, engaging in the time-honored tradition of journeying to specific places of encounter with the holy.

Sister Denise Ressler was prompted to make her own journey to Medjugorje after receiving the gift of a rosary from a friend who had been there. She explains, “One does not just go to Medjugorje. One is called to this journey. I experienced that call, and once I recognized it and made the decision to go, everything just fell into place in a very peaceful way.”

“The countryside of Medjugorje is beautiful,” Sister Denise remembers, “surrounded by mountains, with a variety of green trees and lovely flowers.” And although it is inevitable that some commercialization has occurred, what was most apparent to Sister Denise was the deep faith of the people who lived there and who were industriously engaged in the maintenance of the area as the source of their livelihood.





**Sister Denise with Sister Janja. Sister Janja spent time with the children to whom the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared.**

The heart of the village, and one of the most significant experiences of the journey for Sister Denise, was at St. James Church, where Masses are said in many different languages. Sister Denise was touched by the strong sense of peace and unity she experienced among the many different nationalities. In addition, she and her pilgrimage group were given the delightful privilege of planning

one of the Sunday liturgies, selecting music and doing the readings.

The most meaningful experience of the trip occurred for Sister Denise while she was present when one of the visionaries, named Mirjana, experienced a vision from the Blessed Virgin Mary. While Mirjana was writing down the message received from the Blessed Mother, Sister

Denise placed her hand on her shoulder. Understandably, a security person gently moved her hand away. However, after receiving and recording her message, Mirjana herself reached out and put her hand on the shoulder of Sister Denise, a most personal moment of encounter with one who had just been in the presence of the Blessed Virgin.

Afterwards, in conclusion, Our Lady said for us not to forget our shepherds in our prayers.

Sister Denise says her faith has been strengthened and affirmed by her pilgrimage. "The experience opened my eyes and mind to a global world," she explains, "a sense of unity and oneness. No matter where we were from, we were all there for the same purpose, to experience the presence of the Blessed Mother."

- If you are interested in making a donation in support of our ministries, 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 communication and development, at (701) 355-8907 or email: [jill@annunciationmnoastery.org](mailto:jill@annunciationmnoastery.org)

#### **Message of Our Lady given to Mirjana on Nov. 2, 2006**

*Dear children,*

*My coming to you, my children, is God's love. God is sending me to warn you and to show you the right way. Do not shut your eyes before the truth, my children. Your time is a short time. Do not permit delusions to begin to rule over you. The way on which I desire to lead you is the way of peace and love. This is the way which leads to my Son, your God. Give me your hearts that I may put my Son in them and make apostles of you - apostles of peace and love. Thank you!*



Kiyoka Takiura, Sister Edith Selzler and Yutaka Takiura, architect, by the bell banner of Annunciation Monastery

## Sisters Host Special Guests

A special gift was shared with our monastic community when New York City architect, Yutaka Takiura, and his mother, Kiyoka, a pastor in Japan, made a visit to Annunciation Monastery in January. Takiura has spent over 10 years studying the architecture of the late Marcel Breuer, who designed the sister's first monastery. The gift shared by Takiura was the opportunity to see through his eyes the beauty that continues to inspire those at the University of Mary and Annunciation Monastery today.

## Jesse Manibusan Jams at the Monastery



What an honor it was to share our home with the amazingly talented Christian singer and songwriter, Jesse Manibusan. Jesse is pictured here (center) with local artists, Craig Schweitzer and Jay Griffin. They jammed here at the monastery prior to Jesse's performance at the University of Mary. Our prayers go to Jesse (and his family) for continued blessings in his powerful music ministry. Thanks, Jesse, for reminding us that "God is good...all the time!"

## A "Couple" of Oblates

Husband and wife, Dwight and Karen Kautzmann, searched their hearts to find a "fit" for their spiritual life, and found that fit as oblates of the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. They made their oblation during the Eucharist on Nov. 6.

Sister Susan Berger with Dwight and Karen Kautzmann and Sister Susan Lardy



# In Loving Memory



**Sister Marilyn Sieloff**

*Born August 19, 1913*

*Professed July 11, 1933*

*Died January 16, 2007*

Sister Marilyn served as an English and art teacher, director of new members in the monastic community, chair of the philosophy/theology division and

Scripture teacher at the

University of Mary and led Bible studies. She loved liturgical and personal prayer which transformed her into a God centered woman with a deep love for people. She enjoyed good conversations, books on tape, and was concerned about the well-being of others. Her gentle nature revealed a woman of great faith, love, acceptance and perseverance.



**Sister Mary Martha Dickson**

*Born June 22, 1912*

*Professed July 11, 1938*

*Died February 15, 2007*

Sister Mary Martha served at St. Alexius Medical Center for 55 years, as dietitian, in pastoral care and as a volunteer in intensive care and the medical library. She taught nutrition at the St. Alexius School of Nursing and the University of Mary. She loved being at St. Alexius because she was able to help others. Sister Mary Martha respected people and supported those facing life's challenges. Her deep faith in the goodness of God enabled her to accept life with gratitude. She enjoyed pottery and needlework and even more, teaching others these crafts.



**Sister Georgella Sickler**

*Born October 21, 1910*

*Professed July 11, 1933*

*Died February 6, 2007*

With Sister Georgella's great devotion to Mary, seldom were rosary beads far from her fingers. A founding member of Annunciation Monastery, Sister Georgella

was a cook and housekeeper

most of her monastic life, providing homey atmospheres in convents in western North Dakota. She also served in hospitals and care centers. She was skilled in sewing, crafts and card making. Eager to learn, she enjoyed reading and visiting. A woman in whose presence people felt comfortable, Sister Georgella could laugh at herself and gave wholeheartedly of herself wherever she lived.



**Sister Martha Clare Kilzer**

*Born January 15, 1920*

*Professed July 11, 1944*

*Died February 27, 2007*

Sister Martha Clare, a loving and lovable woman, dedicated her life to service, gratitude and a deep love of Jesus and people of all ages. Her patient and adaptable nature was an asset to the ministries in which she served. She was the first librarian at the University of Mary and taught in St. Lawrence School, Flasher; St. Joseph's School, Dickinson; Cathedral School, Bismarck; St. Egbert's School, North Carolina. She will be remembered for her gentle nature, contemplative spirit, and concern for others.



# In Loving Memory



**Sister Mary Alice Eckroth**

*Born October 5, 1936 \* Professed July 11, 1955 \* Died April 2, 2007*

Sister Mary Alice taught children in the elementary grades for 26 years. Then she served for 23 years in the Health Information Management department at St. Alexius Medical Center. She had a great love of nature. Camping, hiking, fishing, bird watching, horseback riding and gardening all brought joy to her. She also had a deep appreciation for the Native American culture. With a grateful heart, Sister Mary Alice always had kind words for others. She brightened many people's days with her sincere greeting, "God bless you and I will pray for you."



**Sister Harlindis Fischer**

*Born February 17, 1904 \* Professed July 11, 1925 \* Died April 4, 2007*

For 82 years Sister Harlindis lived faithfully and lovingly as a Benedictine sister. She served generously in food service most of her life. A wonderful baker, she spent 23 years at St. Alexius Medical Center stirring up delicious homemade bread and other baked goods. She cooked and baked at convents in Mandan and Dickinson, Bowman Hospital and assisted in the monastery's dietary department. A kind, gentle and cheerful woman, Sister Harlindis had a beautiful smile. She loved her family and enjoyed visiting with them.



**Sister Janice Heiling**

*Born October 21, 1910 \* Professed July 11, 1930 \* Died April 29, 2007*

A woman of tiny stature, Sister Janice could look her elementary students in the eye as she taught them the three R's. She taught first graders for over 50 years. Sister Janice was beloved as a teacher and many of her "youngsters" included Sisters of Annunciation Monastery. One of her sister students said they loved Sister Janice because she was gentle, kind and "little like us!" The gleam in her eyes shimmered with a hint of mischief that endeared her to many.

For many years Sister Janice served as sacristan for church services, training altar boys and volunteering at St. Alexius Medical Center. She tended colorful flowerbeds, was a loyal fan of the University of Mary Marauders and the Minnesota Twins and loved to be alone with the Lord in prayer.



## JUBILEE STORIES

### *Sisters of Annunciation Monastery Celebrate 50 and 60 Years of Monastic Profession*

**T**hree sisters of Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, will celebrate their 50th anniversaries of monastic profession during the Eucharist at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, June 30 in Our Lady of the Annunciation Chapel, Benedictine Center for Servant Leadership. The public is invited to the liturgy and the reception which will follow.

The sisters celebrating their 50-year jubilees are Sister Renee Zastoupil, director of Pastoral Care at St. Alexius Medical Center, Sister Denise Ressler, director of alumni at the University of Mary and Sister Susan Lardy, coordinator of Mission Effectiveness at St. Alexius Medical Center.

**S**ister Renee reflects on her past 50 years as a Benedictine sister, as blessed with many experiences of life-filling moments. For her, each day is a new beginning, enriched with graces and opportunities to live her monastic vocation as a sister of Annunciation Monastery.



**50 year jubilarians: Sister Renee Zastoupil, Sister Susan Lardy and Sister Denise Ressler**

Sister Renee (named Rose at birth) is a native of Dickinson. The daughter of Rose (Kostecky) and the late Joseph Zastoupil, she was raised on the family farm with seven brothers and one sister (Sister Rosanne Zastoupil). Sister Renee recognized God's call early in her childhood to serve as a sister in healthcare.

That vision and hope has been realized by ministering in various capacities; two main ones were serving 26 years as Director of the School of Radiology and now 16 years as hospital chaplain at St. Alexius Medical Center. Her 10 years of service as a volunteer law enforcement chaplain provided another opportunity for her to touch those in need.



Sister Renee says her ministries have been, and continue to be, sustained by prayer, Eucharist and living the monastic life. She continues to give her time, talent and service to patients, families and staff of St. Alexius and to her sisters in community. Her focus is to the ministry of Christ through sacraments, prayer and presence. As a certified spiritual director, Sister Renee assists others in their desire for a deeper relationship with God. Sister Renee encourages other women to consider monastic life because, "I want others to experience the joy I've found in the Lord."



**S**ister Denise (named Viola at birth) is the daughter of the late Frank and Clementine (Leingang) Ressler and is a native of Mandan. She is the youngest of 14 children. Her mother died when she was in the sixth grade. "I asked the Blessed Virgin Mary to take care of me after my mother died," she says. "I think the Lord planted the seed of a religious vocation in me at that point, but I just didn't recognize it. A relative once told me my mother had always prayed to have a sister or priest in the family. My mother's wish came true. I am a sister, and my brother, Jim is a deacon."

Sister Denise taught elementary grades for 17 years at St. Mary's Grade School and Cathedral Grade School, Bismarck; St. Joseph School, Mandan and St. Joseph's School, Dickinson. "Teaching nurtured my love of children," she says. She also served as school librarian for 12 of those 17 years.

For the past 18 years Sister Denise has carried on her love of students and learning at the University of Mary. A consummate planner, she coordinates numerous special events, including student and staff celebrations and reunions. Sister Denise keeps in touch with over 14,000 alumni of the University of Mary.

She is planning the university's 2009 all school reunion, chairs the 40th reunion for the monastery's former high school, Priory High, and serves on the university's 50th anniversary committee, the Diocese of Bismarck's 100th anniversary (2010) and the 50th reunion for St. Mary's High School (2011).

She is excited about her 50-year milestone as a Benedictine sister. "God continues to call women to this life, but it truly has to be a calling, a deep desire to seek God through the monastic life," she says. "My energy comes from my prayer and community life." And energy is a word that describes Sister Denise to a T.



**S**ister Susan feels immense gratitude for the ability to experience her 50th jubilee, particularly after a recent car accident left her wondering at times if she would live to see that day. "When I think of that time of healing, it was both challenging and blessed," she recalls. "The experience instilled in me a much deeper appreciation of the power of prayer and reverence for myself and others."

Sister Susan, daughter of the late Peter and Elizabeth Lardy, grew up on a farm in Sentinel Butte and was the 5th child of seven boys and three girls. Her involvement with sisters began in summer vacation school where she looked forward to being with the nuns. She didn't realize how drawn she was to them until she finished high school. A local pastor asked her if she'd ever considered becoming a sister. She went to Bismarck to get to know the sisters of Annunciation Monastery and decided to enter the community.

Sister Susan's first mission was to teach children. She taught elementary grades in Bismarck and Mandan and later at the

University of Mary. Her next mission was as subprioress of Annunciation Monastery, followed by 12 years of service as prioress. “I didn’t see that I had the potential for that type of leadership, however, others recognized those qualities in me,” she says. Her leadership skills transferred well into a position she later accepted in Fargo as director of the University of Mary Fargo Center, an accelerated degree completion program.

Today Sister Susan works to integrate Benedictine values into the heartbeat of St. Alexius Medical Center. “I find it extremely gratifying to see the continuation of Benedictine values in the monastery’s sponsored institutions – St. Alexius, the University of Mary and Garrison Memorial

Hospital. Each institution has adopted key values which they practice, including hospitality, respect, community, stewardship and service. These are ways we can all contribute to our world and glorify God.”

As Oblate Director at Annunciation Monastery, Sister Susan works with lay women and men who desire to live out the Benedictine values in their daily lives in association with a monastic community.

Sister Susan compares living as a sister in a monastic community to the commitment required in marriage. “As sisters, we must actively work to keep our relationships with God and members of the community healthy and vibrant, just as partners must recommit themselves in a marriage. I feel God’s presence in my prayer life, calling me to renew my relationship with God. I felt the call when I first became a sister and it continues day by day.”



◀ 60-Year Jubilarians: Sister Madonna Wagendorf and Sister Helen Kyllingstad

Sisters Madonna Wagendorf and Helen Kyllingstad will celebrate their 60th anniversaries of monastic profession in a private ceremony with the monastic community in July.

Sister Madonna and Sister Helen are longtime healthcare professionals known for their service in the rural hospitals of North Dakota. Sister Madonna was administrator and nurse anesthetist at Garrison Memorial Hospital for 21 years and Sister Helen filled the same positions at Richardton Hospital for 20 years.



**Sister Madonna**, a native of Mott, became acquainted with the Benedictine sisters when they taught religious education in the summers. Her desire to become a nurse is what attracted Sister Madonna to the Bismarck sisters because of their connection with St. Alexius Hospital. She entered Annunciation Monastery and completed a nursing certification in 1950.

At that time small town hospitals were being built in North Dakota. Sister Madonna was sent to provide medical care at Riverdale Hospital near the site of the construction of the Garrison Dam. She treated men who were injured on the job during this major construction project.

The need for nurse anesthetists arose and Sister Madonna became a certified nurse anesthetist. She served at St. Alexius Hospital, Richardton Hospital, and was instrumental in starting Garrison Memorial Hospital, which opened in 1952 with only two nurses. Sister Madonna was one of them.

Sister Madonna was a mainstay at Garrison for 35 years, serving as a nurse, director of nurses, nurse anesthetist and for the last 21 years as administrator.

After retiring from Garrison hospital in 1995, she became administrative assistant at Annunciation Monastery. In 2002 she moved back to Garrison and serves part-time in spiritual care and medical records at the hospital. She also travels to the monastery to provide healthcare several days a week.

Always a nature lover, Sister Madonna enjoys bird watching, fishing and wildlife.



**Sister Helen** would have never believed as a child that she would one day celebrate 60 years as a Catholic nun. Born in Valley

City, she came from a family of the Baptist faith. Nevertheless, beginning at an early age, her probing mind caused her to seek answers to her life questions and eventually led her to convert to the Catholic faith as an adult. Her appreciation for the Catholic faith came full circle when she became a sister of Annunciation Monastery.

Sister Helen worked as a nurse at St. Alexius Hospital, and she operated hospitals in Beulah, Garrison, and Richardton. Her ministry in health care includes nursing supervision, anesthesia, and hospital administration. Many babies were delivered into her loving and skilled hands.

After going to school for anesthesia and earning a degree in Public Health Administration from Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, she returned to St. Alexius and started the Central North Dakota School for Nurse Anesthetists in 1964. By 1966 Sister Helen was providing freelance anesthesia care in Hazen, Turtle Lake and Richardton. The following year she was asked to become administrator and anesthetist in Richardton where she remained for 20 years. After her retirement, she directed the sisters' health center at the monastery for several years.

Sister Helen is also a nature lover. She explores the monastery grounds, identifying grasses and birds, and arranging beautiful grass bouquets. She delights sisters and guests alike with greeting cards she makes from donated wallpaper books. She works as receptionist and switchboard operator at the Monastery.

Throughout their lives, Sister Helen and Sister Madonna have inspired and encouraged others to attempt what might have otherwise seemed impossible. "This is a good life," says Sister Helen. "I wouldn't change it." She urges all women to follow their dreams, "If you have a dream, just try it. Take the risk."



Mark Your Calendar  
for a Unique Summer Experience!  
Benedictine Live-In at Annunciation Monastery  
for women age 18+ **July 10-15, 2007**



Immerse yourself in the life of Annunciation Monastery. Experience the Benedictine life of prayer, work, study, and leisure.

**Prayer:** Morning and Evening Prayer, Mass, individual spiritual direction, time for private prayer.

**Work:** Depending on each one's abilities and interests, participants work with the sisters in the works of the monastery, such as: music, gardening, cooking, housekeeping, ministry to the elderly, etc.

**Study:** Learn how to discern God's voice, how to participate in shared and personal lectio, and an

overview of Benedictine spirituality.

**Leisure:** Spend time with the sisters in recreational activities. Walk and relax on the Monastery grounds, enjoy the beautiful sunsets.

- Participants are welcome to extend their time at the monastery either before or after the structured part of each experience. You may also come for only a section of the Live-In if that is all your schedule allows. There is no fee charged to participants, however, preregistration is required.

For more information, please contact: Sister Kathleen Atkinson, osb, Annunciation Monastery,  
7520 University Drive, Bismarck, ND 58504

(701) 255-1520 or email: [vocations@annunciationmonastery.org](mailto:vocations@annunciationmonastery.org)

*\*\*Please note: if these dates do not fit into your schedule,  
you may contact Sister Kathleen to make other arrangements for a visit...*

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