



SPRING 2006

Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF

ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

ON PATROL WITH SISTER AGNES

TEACHING theology at the University of Mary four days a week is part of Sister Agnes Reinert's routine. She works in parish outreach for Cathedral of the Holy Spirit where she visits parishioners and occasionally delivers communion to the sick or homebound. However, there is a ministry which requires her to don a bulletproof vest. She serves as a volunteer law enforcement chaplain for the Bismarck Police Department.



Lieutenant Randy Ziegler of the Bismarck Police Department and volunteer chaplain Sister Agnes Reinert serve the public in different ways.

Below, Sister Agnes (SA) and Lieutenant Randy Ziegler (LZ) respond to some questions about this important service to the police department and the community.

Q: How are chaplains utilized at the police department?

LZ: Volunteer chaplains come from a variety of religious backgrounds and serve mainly in a supportive role to the law enforcement officers who face stressful situations on a daily basis. The chaplains ride along with our officers and get to know them. The officers can talk with the chaplains about the challenges they face both personally or professionally — anything at all.

Q: What are some of the common situations you encounter during these ride alongs?

SA: There are domestic abuse situations, thefts, suspicious activity, drug related incidents, fires, accidents. We are also called to assist the officer with death notifications to families.

Q: Do you ever feel concerned about your personal safety?

SA: No, not really. The officers are very capable and if they feel there is a threat to our safety, we are asked to remain in the police car. We do, however, wear a bullet-proof vest, and a jacket that identifies us as chaplains.

MESSAGE FROM THE *Prioress*



EACH year around March 21, the Feast of St. Benedict, the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery host two days at the University of Mary called “Benedictine Awareness.” It is an opportunity for us to visit with the university students and faculty about St. Benedict and Benedictine values and history.

This year we celebrated the “Benedictine Awareness” Eucharist on March 22 on campus. I shared the following message with the students during the Eucharist:

“As I reflected on the readings for today’s Mass, I was struck with their message to teach. The first reading from Deuteronomy said, ‘Take care...not to forget the things which your own eyes have seen, nor let them slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children’s children.’ In today’s gospel, St. Matthew also talked about teaching, ‘Whoever obeys and teaches these commandments will be called greatest in the kingdom of heaven.’

“I also reflected on the wonderful saints we have just celebrated: March 17, St. Patrick; March 19, St. Joseph; and March 21, St. Benedict. All three saints lived in dangerous times. They all taught, each in his own way. They continue to teach centuries after their deaths.

“St. Patrick was kidnapped by pirates when he was 16 years old and taken to Ireland as a slave. Six years later he escaped to England, became a priest, and returned to Ireland where he ministered and spread the faith in peace. Patrick had forgiven his oppressors. As he preached, he especially taught by his witness of love over anger and bitterness.

“St. Joseph was a silent figure. We have no record of anything he said. He will teach us forever through his example of faith, love and doing what God told him to do — take Mary as his wife and flee with her and Jesus to Egypt. Joseph still teaches us how to respond to God’s call — simple and clear, with strength and love. We don’t have to say one word.

“St. Benedict lived when the city of Rome was being destroyed by barbarians. He fled to the mountains outside Rome to get away from it all. His intent was to be a hermit, but because he was such a good man, he was pursued by people who asked about how to seek God and how to live in community in peace, service, and love — very different from what was going on in Italy at the time. Benedict still teaches through the Rule he wrote, a way of life, a school of the Lord’s service. His Rule is a guide for people to learn together to find God in everyday life — praying, studying, doing dishes, answering the telephone, nursing the sick, writing, composing music, balancing the checkbook, using resources wisely — whatever needs to be done to live together well.

“Patrick, Joseph, and Benedict — three men in three different situations and countries, all with the same desire - to live in God’s love as long as they lived. Today WE remember God’s love and faithfulness, and we desire to live in that love.

“Mother Teresa of Calcutta is frequently called a contemporary saint. What she spoke, she lived. It is she who said, ‘Love cannot remain by itself...Love has to be put into action and that action is service...Whatever form we are, able or disabled, rich or poor, it is not how much we do but how much love we put in the doing — a lifelong sharing of love with others.’

“We, in this place of servant leadership, carry on Benedictine tradition and values, in this place built solid and strong with prairie stone, and securely planted on the wide-open prairie. Wherever we are and whatever we do, whether we preach like Patrick, listen and care for people in quiet like Joseph, or write words that inspire like Benedict, may WE not forget all the days of our lives the love of God which OUR eyes have seen.”

Sister Susan Berger, OSB

POLICE CHAPLAINS COMFORT PEOPLE IN GRIEF AND SHOCK

Q: What are some of the benefits the chaplains provide to the officers and to the community?

LZ: The chaplains are invaluable to the department. In my opinion, they are as important as the officers because they provide an extra element of personal concern and care for the people at the scene that we don't always have the resources to provide.

During a time of crisis, people really need support through their grief and shock. The best people to be there for them are the chaplains. They are on call day and night, always ready to lend a hand in whatever way they can. Police officers receive training in dealing with people in crisis, but that extra personal and spiritual presence is so critical.

There was a trailer fire the week prior to Christmas and Sister Agnes was there to help the family. She spent time with the family and helped them make arrangements to stay at a local hotel until they found a more permanent place to stay. She helped gather daily essentials like soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, toothpaste, clothing, etc. She even brought them some donated gifts and a Christmas tree.

Sister Agnes and the other chaplains provide ongoing comfort and follow-up to the families which is so important. After the officer leaves the scene, that's usually the end of our involvement unless there is an investigation.

"It is always difficult to see suffering. I find I'm able to let go by keeping those people in prayer. In the suffering, goodness always seems to surface in big and small ways."

Sister Agnes Reinert

The chaplains help people get food, shelter, clothing or they provide resource information to those dealing with funeral arrangements — those kinds of details.

Q: How many chaplains volunteer for the Bismarck police department?

LZ: Chaplain Dan Sweeney is our full-time chaplain who also works with the fire department and Metro Ambulance. He coordinates five volunteer chaplains who take call and accompany officers on ride alongs. Chaplain Sweeney is tireless in his efforts in providing help to the homeless and vouchers for those in need of food and other essentials. He does tremendous work.

Q: Sister Agnes, how does this ministry affect you personally?

SA: This work has opened a whole new window for me. I have become so much more aware of the lives people are living. I've become more in touch with the broader community, especially our youth. The widespread domestic abuse and drug use is very disturbing. I think this ministry has strengthened compassion within me, as well as created a greater tolerance, patience and forgiveness because of the things I have witnessed.

Q: Is it difficult to let go of the tragic situations you've encountered?

SA: It is always difficult to see suffering. After you've been through a crisis situation with someone, you know it's not over for that person. I find I'm able to let go by keeping those people in prayer. In the suffering, goodness always seems to surface in big and small ways.

Q: What have you learned about our law enforcement officers?

SA: I have learned that the men and women who work in law enforcement are caring, compassionate and professional. I have seen a great respect as they carry out their duties. The officers work long, often very stressful hours and still, they do their best to protect and make our community better each day.

LZ: (Smiling) The feeling is mutual.

With a Grateful Heart, Sister Susan Lardy Continues to Recover from Car Accident

FIVE months later, Sister Susan Lardy remembers nothing of the November car accident which left her in critical condition.

She remembers earlier the day of the accident, a fall day beautiful enough to wear a spring jacket to attend a concert in Minot. And she remembers afterward, knowing she was in a hospital, and somehow knowing that it was not St. Alexis. She also knew she had lacerations in her scalp because she could feel the staples.

She also said she is pretty sure that she and Sister Mariah Dietz said their travel prayers for their Minot trip that day.

In one light, it could look like those prayers backfired. But there is a more far-seeing perspective, five months later, to the day, of the accident that severely injured her right arm and neck.

"I have my arm," Sister Susan said. "I'm alive. I'm loved and I'm here."

Sister Susan Berger, prioress of Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck, was at Sister Susan Lardy's side in the Minot hospital within an hour, and sisters

"The concern people had was overwhelming. It filled me with wonder and love."

Sister Susan Lardy

from Annunciation have taken turns being with her in intensive care there and at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., during her hospitalization and surgeries.

On Nov. 26, an air ambulance flew her there from Minot, in a neck brace for a fracture in one of her cervical vertebrae and the rest of her bound as snugly as in a cocoon, Sister Gerard Wald at her side.

Initially, Mayo doctors weren't sure they would be able to save her right arm. And the break in her cervical vertebra might have paralyzed her. But doctors repaired a complicated break in her upper arm bone, requiring screws and plates to reconstruct; did elbow surgery; grafted muscle from her back to her arm; and fused the break in the cervical vertebra.

After the accident, word had spread quickly, said Jill Ackerman, director of communications for the monastery. People in the community inquired after Sister Susan daily, Ackerman said.

"It's so humbling to know people from all walks of life are praying for you," Sister Susan said.

Because of that, "I told the doctors I had to recover," she said.

By the time she was flown back to Bismarck Dec. 29, she was up and walking after four weeks in bed, grateful to stand.

Taken directly to St. Alexis, she spent two weeks in rehabilitation there, and finally was released to Annunciation on Jan. 12 for her recuperation.

Her first trip to the monastery dining room only lasted about 20 minutes, but it was very emotional, she said.

She now has therapy at the Human Performance Center and from University of Mary physical therapy students. Therapy, including heat, ultrasound and movement, helps loosen the joints in her shoulder and elbow that were reconstructed.

She also is a faithful walker to strengthen the muscle tone in her legs lost from the long immobility. A month ago, she put aside the cane she was using, and now also has taken off the neck brace. Her handwriting has returned and looks good, except when her right hand gets tired, she said.

All her life, Sister Susan has been busy, always occupied. Months before the accident Sister Susan remembers during prayers, saying that she'd never had to suffer.

"I had never been sick in my life."

Now, she said, "I had to put aside the doing. I learned a new meaning of patience and waiting." She also realized how fast one's life changes.

"My heart is just full of gratitude," she said. "The concern people had was overwhelming. It filled me with wonder and love. The loving support from (the religious community) is so peace-filling," she said.

The Mayo doctors have told her to give her recovery a year, she said.

No matter what, "I won't be the same, hopefully I'll be more grateful for whatever comes my way."



Sister Susan Lardy

*By Karen Herzog - Bismarck Tribune reporter
reprinted courtesy of Bismarck Tribune*

The Banquet



Sisters and University of Mary students prepare to serve a meal.

SISTERS from Annunciation Monastery cooked and served "The Banquet" at Trinity Lutheran Church in January. The Bismarck-Mandan area Banquet, begun and organized by Trinity Lutheran Church, is a community based effort to provide food and companionship for those in need. More than 300 people were served by the sisters who were joined by University of Mary student volunteers.

Yum! Fresh Bread

THE aroma of fresh-baked bread wafts throughout the monastery on a regular basis as Sister Gemma Peters mixes TLC into each loaf she makes.

What is the secret to her success in the art of bread baking? She says, "Baking bread is very spiritual and therapeutic for me."



Sister Gemma Peters shows her creation of "Prairie Grain Bread"

"This is my time to be with God. I pray and marvel at creation — by starting with yeast and adding other ingredients, amazing things begin to happen; just as the amazing things that happen when God mixes with us." This patient process can be compared to God's patience for us as we are formed throughout our lives, she added.

Woman of Prayer

SISTER Mary Alice Eckroth was honored at her retirement party at St. Alexius Medical Center, where she worked in Health Information Management for 23 years. Staff members expressed their love, gratitude and fond memories of time spent in her special presence.



Sister Mary Alice Eckroth

Joyce LaChapelle, a medical center employee, attests to the fact that people could always count on having their day brightened by Sister Mary Alice.

LaChapelle says Sister Mary Alice would periodically call her at home and remind her that she was praying for her. This was not an uncommon practice for Sister Mary Alice. Whether an employee stopped to visit, or simply walked by, Sister Mary Alice, with a wave of her hand and a smile, would extend a sincere "God bless you," that resounded through the hall.

Greg Lord, manager of Great Plains Rehabilitation Services, said, "There has never been anyone who has prayed for me so much; she has impacted my life in a very heartwarming way."

Although her service in the Health Information Management department will be missed, Sister Mary Alice says she will continue to take part in St. Alexius activities. "By attending morning Mass at the medical center, I will be able to keep in touch with my many friends."

In Loving Memory of Sister Mary Leo Bleth

February 7, 1913 to January 7, 2006



Sister Mary Leo ministered in the health care field in Minnesota and North Dakota as a staff nurse, and in nursing administration, supervision and education. She was instrumental in starting the senior center in Dickinson and helped plan low income housing in Dickinson.

She loved researching and publishing her family tree, enjoyed tatting beautiful creations and had a deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. She was a faithful and dedicated servant of God and God's people.

Sister Miriam Offers Rare Treasury of Medieval Women Mystics

WHEN scholars study medieval monastic women, they often consult Sister Miriam Schmitt of Annunciation Monastery to ensure accuracy and authenticity. She co-edited the book *Medieval Women Monastics - Wisdom's Wellsprings* which she calls a "must have" for religious communities. One of its chapters is authored by Sister Miriam and the illustrations are done by Sister Michael Kaliher, also of Annunciation Monastery.

Her extensive collection of over 20 years of research on these fascinating women is a rare treasury of information. She has been called upon to give lectures throughout the country to groups desiring to immerse themselves in the lives, visions, art, music and writings of medieval mystics—including Hildegard of Bingen, Gertrude of Helfta, and others.

A course on early Christian ascetics or "desert mothers" spurred Sister Miriam's interest in women mystics. Little did she know, that interest would

"These women continue to be relevant today, because of their very real experiences with God. They were courageous leaders in a day when morality was low."

Sister Miriam Schmitt

extend over the next two decades. "These women continue to be relevant today, because of their very real experiences with God," explains Sister Miriam. "They were courageous leaders in a day when morality was low. The women preached to those in powerful positions which was usually a dangerous thing to do, especially for women."

As Sister Miriam explored the lives of these mystics, she committed herself to sharing their legacy with others. "If anyone ever mentions Hildegard, my heart still throbs today," she says with emotion. In a concerted effort, Sister Miriam and Sister Nancy Gunderson are cataloguing the



Sister Miriam Schmitt shares her collection of medieval women mystics.

collection and creating a Center for the Study of Medieval Women Monastics/Mystics which will be housed at Annunciation Monastery. The center will offer books, research papers, publications, presentations, cassettes, pictures, slides and music. These resources will be available to any Benedictine, scholar, oblate or religious community member. "We are dedicated to preserving this collection in a usable format for future generations," says Sister Nancy.

"If anyone ever mentions Hildegard, my heart still throbs today."

Sister Miriam Schmitt

This project was awarded a grant from the American Benedictine Academy which covered some of the expenses to help house the materials. Current needs for the project include bookshelves, costs for photo scanning and printing, CDs and cassette racks.

To donate to the Center for the Study of Medieval Women Monastics/Mystics Project, please use the enclosed envelope or contact Jill Ackerman, director of communications, (701) 355-8907. Thank you.

With a Song in Her Heart, Sister Rebecca Celebrates 50th Jubilee



Sister Rebecca Mayer looks forward to 50th jubilee.

SISTER Rebecca Mayer will celebrate her 50th anniversary as a Benedictine Sister of Annunciation Monastery during a Eucharistic liturgy at 1 p.m. July 8 in Our Lady of the Annunciation Chapel.

The chapel is located in the Benedictine Center for Servant Leadership on the campus of the University of Mary. The public is invited to the liturgy and the reception which will follow.

Sister Rebecca, who grew up on a farm near Mott, ND, spent most of her monastic life teaching music, planning and implementing liturgies and most recently has spearheaded a 10 year project to create 10 volumes of new prayer books for the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery.

Sister Rebecca serves on the lay advisory board for Garrison Memorial Hospital and on the University of Mary Board of Trustees. She is a member of the National Pastoral Musicians Association.

The seed to become a sister was planted in Rebecca's mind at the age of 12 when one of her teachers, Sister Helen Margaret, spoke to her students about the call to religious life. Rebecca casually tossed that thought aside but kept being "reminded" of God's call.

Music has always been an important part of Sister Rebecca's life. The sisters taught her to play piano

and allowed her to practice on their piano since she had no piano at home. "I would practice and hear their joyful conversations in the background." She says she felt God was gently calling her.

After graduating from high school at the age of 16, Rebecca announced to her mother that she thought she wanted to become a sister. "I'll never forget the way my mother's face lit up when I told her," recalls Sister Rebecca. Her mother recommended that she write letters and spend time with the sisters. That is what she did and it turned into a relationship that affirmed her thoughts of becoming a sister. She entered Annunciation Monastery on Sept. 6, 1954, and made her monastic profession July 11, 1956.

Sister Rebecca's extensive background in music, composition, and worship opened many doors to her. She taught music at: Cathedral School, Bismarck; St. Joseph's School, Mandan; St. Patrick's School, Dickinson. While in Dickinson, Sister Rebecca became a charter member of the MU PHI Epsilon music sorority at Dickinson State College.

She holds a BA in music, a master's degree in music education and a master's degree in music and liturgy.

In 1984 she began her work for the Diocese of Bismarck as associate director of the Office of Worship and held that position for 10 1/2 years. Her work with the diocese included planning and implementing diocesan liturgies and giving parish liturgy workshops. She was a member of the diocesan RENEW team, helping implement faith development processes throughout the diocese.

***"I am always lifted up by God
and this community of sisters."***

Sister Rebecca Mayer

Sister Rebecca looks back on her 50 years as a sister as blessed. "I used to think the tasks ahead of me seemed so hard, but I would think of all of the sisters who accomplished so much and they always inspired me to keep trying. There was always someone in community, sometimes the most unlikely person, who would support me through any challenge I encountered, and it's still that way. I am always lifted up by God and this community of sisters."

Sisters: A Great Support System!

JUST north of the monastery stands the University of Mary founded by Annunciation Monastery Sisters who play a vital part in campus life.

Students Brooks Hetle and Micah Rothmann share their thoughts on the influence of the sisters at the University of Mary.

"I think one of the main things that really strikes me is that the sisters pray for us. Not only do they pray for us as a group, but they get to know us on a more personal level and pray for our special needs — that is humbling," remarks Hetle.

Sister Thomas Welder, president of the University of Mary, surprises students with her remarkable memory and interest in the students. Rothmann says, "How many university presidents actually remember the names of the students? And not only that, but Sister Thomas asks about our

families, she is always sincerely interested in our lives and studies."

Rothmann also points out that it is common to see sisters at student plays, concerts and sporting events.

"It is comforting knowing the sisters are there for us as students," says Rothmann. "They encourage us to get involved and explore our areas of interest."

Sister Gerard, director of student volunteers and coordinator for first year experience at the University of Mary, says the students continue to energize her each day. "Every student has his or her own gifts and talents and to witness them develop through servant leadership gives us hope for the future."



University of Mary students Micah Rothmann and Brooks Hetle speak about the sisters' influence on the university campus.

Students frequently visit the monastery to attend Eucharist, join the sisters for lunch, play bingo or just enjoy the sisters' company.

"I have found the sisters to be a great support system — they want us to succeed and they continue to be a great example of leadership for students," explains Hetle.

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