

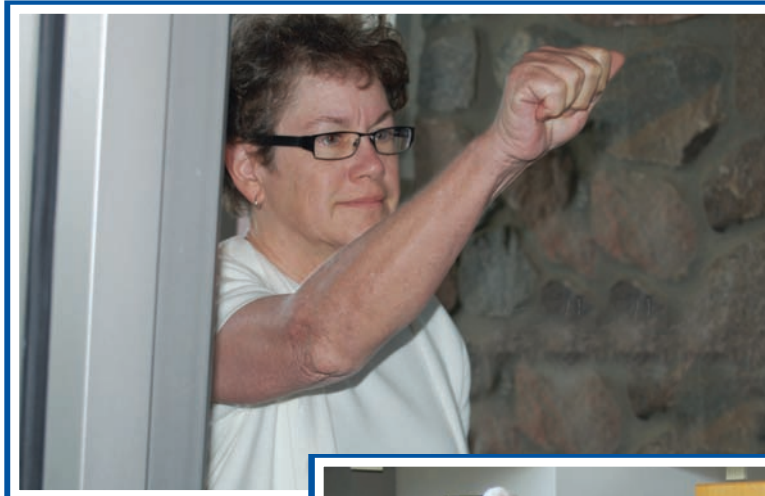
Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF

ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

FALL/WINTER 2009

www.annunciationmonastery.org



Top Photo: Rosemary DeGracia knocks at the monastery entrance

Bottom Photo: Rosemary is surrounded by the prayerful and loving support of the monastic community.



Sisters Welcome New Postulant

*O*n a sunny August afternoon, a knock at the front door of the monastery signaled the arrival of Rosemary DeGracia.

Smiles abounded as she was received by Prioress Sister Nancy Miller and was surrounded by the community of sisters. This was the beginning of a beautiful ceremony welcoming Rosemary as a

postulant of Annunciation Monastery. Rosemary was raised in Rockford, IL, and has lived in Fresno, CA, for the past 30 years.

A widowed mother of five children, Rosemary has many diverse gifts. She received her undergraduate degree in sociology from California State University,

Story continued on page 3...



MESSAGE FROM THE

Prioress

Our Call TO STEWARDSHIP

We know many of our friends share our deep concern about stewardship and healing our damaged Earth.

This year we, as a monastic community, particularly call ourselves to growth and conversion in the area of stewardship, the care of the Earth and its resources. We know well about the crisis in our world economically and environmentally.

We humans have not been good stewards of this Earth our Creator gave us to tend. I don't have to tell you about global warming, destructive weather patterns, famine, harm to our atmosphere by excessive CO2 emissions and the destruction caused by deforestation.

We stand at a critical point in Earth's history and we are called to do something to protect and preserve the planet on which we live – not only for us, but also for generations to come. We ask ourselves, "What can a small group of Benedictine women do to preserve the planet? What difference will it make?"

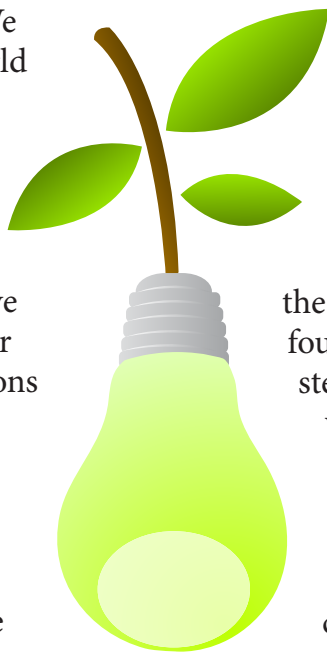
"All Good Gifts," a statement of the Conference of American Benedictine Prioresses points out that "two temptations face monastic

communities in a world deeply in need of stewardship: the first, that we can do nothing; the second, that we must do everything.

Like all ordinary people of the world, the Benedictine knows what it is to be small in the face of corporate grandeur and powerless in a rigid system, yet responsible for tomorrow...

We cannot do everything; we can do something." (Of All Good Gifts, 77-78).

We sisters are studying Scripture, the Rule of St. Benedict and articles foundational to our understanding of stewardship to help us learn more about what is happening to our planet and our responsibility to nurture it. We are planning actions both personally and communally to do our part to care for our Earth. We know we cannot do everything but we must do something. As our plans develop, we will keep you informed. May we all learn to live more simply so that others can simply live.



Sister Nancy Miller, OSB

Sister Nancy Miller, OSB



Sister Nancy presents the Benedictine medal to Rosemary

Fresno, where she also did graduate work in Public Administration. She worked as a senior analyst for the City of Fresno for 23 years and in volunteer ministry as RCIA director for her parish.

Rosemary says her Midwestern roots helped her acclimate to North Dakota. She has been a Benedictine oblate for the past 12 years and started discerning her call to religious life after the death of her husband six years ago. She says, "The idea of becoming a sister has been percolating for a number of years and I explored several Benedictine communities prior to God's tug in this direction. The Benedictine balance between prayer and work, active and contemplative, and the Benedictine tradition all draw me. I have always had a monastic side."

Sister Mariah Dietz (postulant director), Rosemary DeGracia,
Sister Nicole Kunze (affiliate director) and Prioress Sister Nancy Miller

"The prayer of the community was the most important aspect to me. That was when I really felt this is where I belong."

Over the past two years, Rosemary visited Annunciation Monastery several times, learning about the community and prayer life of the sisters. She says what attracted her to Annunciation Monastery was the liturgy, praying the Divine Office with the sisters. "The prayer of the community was the most important aspect to me. That was when I really felt this is where I belong," she says.

How do Rosemary's adult children feel about her vocation? She consulted them before applying for the sisters' affiliate program and has been affirmed by their support and encouragement. Her oldest son explained her call as a "logical progression" in her life.

Rosemary enjoys knitting, reading, baking and exploring the area. As a postulant, she will transition more deeply into the prayer and community life of the sisters and will work on special projects.



CONGRATULATIONS Sister Melissa!

Sister Melissa Cote was on the dean's honor roll at Creighton University, Omaha, Neb., for the spring semester of the 2008-09 academic year. Sister Melissa served as a pharmacy technician at St. Alexius Medical Center over the summer and returned to Creighton University as a third year pharmacy student. She plans to graduate in May of 2011 with a doctorate in pharmacy (PharmD).





Father Shea and Sister Thomas are devoted to developing servant leaders at the University of Mary.

Sister Thomas Accepts New Ministry at University of Mary

Retirement is not in the vocabulary of Sister Thomas Welder as she moves from 31 years as president of the University of Mary to president emerita.

Sister Thomas, a member of Annunciation Monastery, may have entertained the notion of learning to make pie crusts and organizing her bookshelves in her retirement but those who know her understand that the university will always be a part of her.

A woman held in warm esteem and loved by many people, Sister Thomas will stay on at the university and provide services to the office of public affairs. "This is a perfect ministry for me," she says. "I am relieved of the stress that comes from being in a leadership position such as president, but look forward to continuing my relationships with the internal and external university community." She adds that there is great joy and many benefits that come from belonging to a faith community such as the

monastery and the University of Mary. "To continue to be a part of both communities is a gift to me."

Sister Thomas is pleased that Father James Shea has accepted the position of president. "He fully believes that this is God's call for him," she says. "With that comes great peace and energy. You can manage the challenge and the opportunity because you know you are not in it alone. He also has great confidence in the support of the sisters."

Sister Thomas believes that the sponsorship of the University of Mary by the Sisters of Annunciation Monastery is what makes it distinctive. "Our founding sisters were true pioneers," she says. "They were willing to step out into the unknown and take risks to meet the needs of the people of the region. To have that close association and support of the sisters gifts the University of Mary with its past and confirms its vision into the future."

Oblates Deepen Their Faith with Sisters

Callers might think they have mistakenly reached a men's religious community when they hear the friendly, deep voice of Dennis Larkin answer the phone at Annunciation Monastery. In fact, you might think him a monk upon first sight with his thoughtful expression directed to a book he's currently absorbed in. At least you might think that until you see his beloved wife, Lynda, sitting beside him – also reading.

There is something to be said about the comfortableness of marriage when husband and wife are simply happy to be in one another's presence. That seems to be the case with Dennis and Lynda. They extend hospitality to callers and visitors by volunteering at the front desk. What a blessing they are to our community.

Dennis was raised Catholic in Providence, RI. It was there he received his master's degree in counseling. At that time, his colleagues were participating in a North Dakota program with the State Industrial School (SIS) in Mandan. Dennis decided to leave Rhode Island for work at SIS. He feels this move was part of God's plan to lead him more deeply into his faith and to his wife, Lynda, who was born and raised in Bismarck.

Life got busier for them during the years they were raising their four children. That was a period in their lives when they decided to explore different religions and see where their beliefs aligned. The couple attended the Catholic parish of Cathedral of the Holy Spirit and Lynda worked as a cook for Father Tom Kramer for a time.

After moving to Mandan, they started to attend the Presbyterian Church which was the Church in which Lynda was raised. Then Lynda started reading and learning more about Pope John Paul II. "I read about what he advised and encouraged and I knew he was right," she says. "We believe Father Kramer's prayers called us back to Cathedral. It felt like home when we came back."



Oblates Dennis and Lynda Larkin

Lynda and Dennis began looking for ways to become more involved in the Catholic faith. Their journey led them to Annunciation Monastery where they became oblates. They have been oblates for over eight years. Oblates are individuals who associate themselves with a monastic community, meet to deepen and share their faith, and live out the Benedictine values and prayer life as their state of life permits. The Larkins incorporate the Benedictine monastic lifestyle into their marriage as they pray the liturgy of the hours. They feel blessed to be active in the lives of their three precious grandchildren.

"I always ask myself, 'Do I feel better after I've been here than when I come in?' And the answer is always Yes."

According to the Larkins, they have made many friends through their participation with the sisters and other oblates at events and oblate meetings. Lynda finds value in attending because she feels more connected to God. Dennis explains, "You can belong to a lot of different groups, but if the goals and values conflict with yours, you leave. I always ask myself, 'Do I feel better after I've been here than when I come in?' and the answer is always 'Yes,' it's a wonderful place to be."

Adventures in Gardening

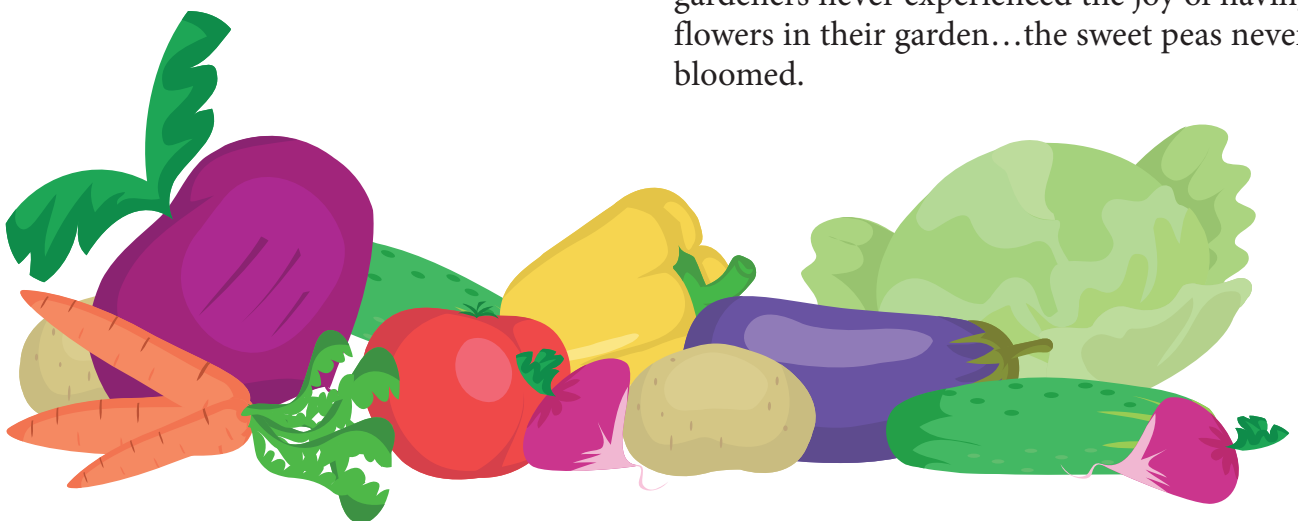
One day in late summer, as they found themselves standing knee-deep in hundreds of beet plants surveying their vegetable garden, Sisters Hannah and Gerard took a moment to ponder. From a rocky and adventure-filled beginning, their garden had come a long way... This is their story.

Their garden adventures began last spring with rhubarb. They thought it would be a great idea to transplant the rhubarb plants that were growing by the community trailer to their garden, a distance of about half a mile. One sunny morning Sister Gerard drove the pick-up down to the rhubarb plants to begin transplanting. Sister Gerard dug up what she thought was rhubarb and drove it to their garden. Excited about her newly replanted “rhubarb,” she told Sister Hildegarde, one of the resident gardening experts. They went to look at the new plants and had not even stopped the car yet when Sister Hildegarde exclaimed, “Those plants are not rhubarb, those are WEEDS!!” Not to be discouraged, Sister Gerard dug out the weeds and replanted the *real* rhubarb.

The amateur gardeners' next adventure involved the invasion of pheasants. They planted their garden in June, carefully marking out rows and dropping in seeds at appropriate intervals. Nearly every day they checked on

their garden only to be disappointed. Nothing. Well, that is not really true...the beets starting growing with a vengeance early on and never stopped. They soon learned from Sister Miriam and others who could see their garden from the dining room window, that pheasants had been visiting their garden and plucking out seeds. Undaunted, the gardeners set out again, replanting the entire garden. This time, it was not the pheasants that ruined their planting, but the rain. The garden received six inches of rain during a rainstorm, washing out all the seed. They replanted again, hoping the third time would be the charm. Thankfully, it was!

Another adventure began with transplanting peas. One day, as Sisters Hannah and Gerard were applying Miracle-Gro to their garden, they noticed something odd. Peas were growing all along the edge of the garden. They were growing well, but were practically in the grass. The gardeners moved them to the center of the garden. After that the pea plants began to take off! However, they did not look like any peas they had seen before. They were spreading but never bloomed. During supper, Sisters Hannah and Gerard asked why their sweet peas were not producing! One of the sisters clued them in – sweet peas are not peas for eating, they are flowers! Sister Hannah and Sister Gerard were surprised, but not completely unhappy. After all, they like flowers. Unfortunately, the gardeners never experienced the joy of having flowers in their garden...the sweet peas never bloomed.



*"By their fruits,
we shall know them."*

Matthew 7:16

One last adventure involved Sister Hannah's new find. She found some tiny plants that looked promising. She cleared the weeds away from them and gave them water. She was excited, even though she was not sure what these plants were. Sisters Hannah and Gerard were continuously surprised at what came up in their garden. As Sister Gerard always said, "by their fruits, we shall know them." The two applied Miracle-Gro to help the new baby plants along. The plants grew rapidly. Still not sure what they were watering, they cared for them until it was obvious what these new plants were – WEEDS!

After all those adventures, their garden still managed to thrive. They found themselves with lots of healthy vegetables, including radishes, beans, lettuce, carrots, beets, squash,



Sister Hannah and Sister Gerard proudly display beets from their garden.

cucumbers, tomatoes, and a few surprise pumpkins. Even though they had many misadventures, they enjoyed every minute of gardening. Every time they share their bountiful produce with their community, they realize it was all worth it!

By Sister Hannah Vanorny and Sister Gerard Wald

Welcome

Father James Patrick Shea

In welcome and appreciation for Father James Patrick Shea, new president of the University of Mary, the sisters invited him to Evening Prayer and a special dinner in his honor. The University of Mary is one of the sisters' sponsored ministries. God bless you, Father Shea!

Top Photo: The sisters extend their arms in a blessing upon Father Shea.

Bottom Photo: Sister Nancy Miller presents Father Shea with a print of the Annunciation icon which graces the gathering space at Annunciation Monastery to remind him of the prayerful support of the sisters and of God's call to his new ministry.



Walking Holy Ground

There's a road that runs right through your heart. Travel it.

Be prepared for the rough call of the pilgrimage...

feet that surrender to the relentless movement.

Jesus was a walker too...surrendered to the

destination to which he was called.

~Elizabeth Brennan



It was with this quote, gifted to me by Sister Janet Zander from her summer in the Benedictine Rome Renewal, that I boarded the plane on June 4, 2009. Smooth flight connections, friendly traveling companions, crossing ocean and dateline without leaving my seat, these all brought me to the city of Rome, Italy. I was immediately plunged into the pilgrimage experience of being the outsider, and by necessity surrendered to others for navigational directions, money exchange, language interpretation, and dining suggestions.

It's easy to be overwhelmed in the plethora of churches, persons, events and monuments in Italy. Each day felt like a semester course in Ancient/ Medieval/ Renaissance history. But it's the way of the Benedictine to find corners in which to step back from the immense and find God in the daily and ordinary. Such was my experience – gifted with five weeks and a schedule with regular intervals for reflection, I was able to step down from the tourist bus and walk as a pilgrim.

Here are some of the treasures I found: Seeking out the source of a melody filling the Cathedral Square in Siena, I met a violin player. A refugee from Poland, he found a home in the heart of Tuscany, once home to my patron saint, Catherine of Siena.

I spent an afternoon on the Apian way, one of the earliest and most important roads of the Roman Republic. Aqueduct ruins from the third century BC and Catacombs from the first century AD border the road. I walked the actual path mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles; the path walked by Peter and Paul, earliest proclaimers of the Gospel by which I seek to live today.

Entering St. Peter's Basilica, the "Mother Church" of our Roman Catholic faith, is truly an experience that can't be comprehended with only one or 100 visits. The papacy, liturgy, architecture, and art easily lived up to my expectations. The familiarity I felt from a lifetime of photos and television broadcasts paled in the living presence of people – multitudes of people from all nations and heritage - people of faith. One particular morning, I found a hidden corner near the Pieta; I watched and prayed.

And of course, since this opportunity was a Benedictine Renewal, and we were Benedictine women from the United States, India, Canada, and Australia, it was the destinations of Saint Benedict and his twin sister, Scholastica, to which we were called. What blessed and transforming moments they were: nestling into Benedict's hermitage on the hillside of Subiaco, visiting his



Sister Kathleen at the top of Caste San Angelo in Rome

parish church while he was a student in Rome, praying at the tomb of Benedict and Scholastica in Monte Casino, and renewing our monastic vows in their family town of Nursia.

At each of these locations our pilgrim community sang, "This is holy ground. We're standing on holy ground. For our God is present and where God is, is holy."

And from each of these locations, we walked onward.

*Knowing that our hearts were changed.
Knowing that our presence in the land
of Benedict and Scholastica has made
each new destination holy ground.
Knowing that is the way of the pilgrim.*

By Sister Kathleen Atkinson

Sister Madelyn Louttit's new ministry at the University of Mary enables her to provide leadership for an accessibility services program serving the needs of students and visitors with disability-related needs and services. Her responsibilities include the development, implementation and evaluation of administrative procedures regarding student support and accommodations. Sister Madelyn serves as the primary contact for faculty, students, parents, administrators, staff and health care providers to coordinate the delivery of accommodation services.



Sister Madelyn Louttit, director of Accessibility Services at the University of Mary

Sister Barbara Ann

INDUCTED INTO HALL OF FAME

Nominated by a former student, the late Sister Barbara Ann Gehrki was inducted into the St. Mary's Central High School Hall of Fame on Sept. 11. Sister Barbara Ann was an English, Speech and American Literature teacher at St. Mary's Central High School from 1948-1966. She inspired her students to appreciate the beauty and culture that the arts offered. She is one of the founders of Annunciation Monastery and the University of Mary.



Sister Kathryn Zimmer displays the poster of Sister Barbara Ann

Many of her former students credit her for introducing them to the arts and teaching them to love reading, speech, debate and drama. Her nominator notes, "Sister was the most influential teacher in my life. She challenged me to make appreciating literature a life-long endeavor."

Sisters and Students Enjoy Involvement Day at the University of Mary



Postulant Rosemary DeGracia, Sisters Gerard Wald, Gemma Peters, Agatha Muggli, Hannah Vanorny, University of Mary campus ministry chicken mascot, and Sister Kathleen Atkinson invite students to visit Annunciation Monastery and sign up for Benedictine Campus Friends.

SISTERS BEGIN CHEMO CAP MINISTRY



Sisters Edith Selzler and Terrence Glum made these beautiful chemo caps that will be distributed at cancer care facilities throughout Bismarck. The caps will be offered at no cost to people undergoing medical treatments that cause hair loss.

Sister Nancy Gunderson Receives Art Award

Sister Nancy Gunderson's art was featured in the First Presbyterian Fine Arts Festival "Celebrating Creation on the Prairie" in September. This event has been in existence for over 20 years and featured over 300 exhibitors. Festival activities included a juried art exhibit, coffee house, high tea, special music performances and artist demonstrations.

One of Sister Nancy's pieces, *Trinity*, was awarded the Nellie Solberg Memorial Award. "I started the piece on an early spring day when I was longing for green and life to burst forth," she said. "I noticed the birds were building nests before the trees had leafed out so they were easily seen. Since the nest has three eggs, I call the piece *Trinity*. It is a whole meditation on the freshness of God's life and an abundance of life waiting to fill us."



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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, (701)355-8907 or: jill@annunciationmonastery.org

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If you prefer to send a check in the mail, that is perfectly fine! We are grateful for your support.

God bless you and thank you for joining in our mission and ministries!



Jeff Tescher, Murray Ereth and Maurice Lardy

Jeff Tescher joined monastery maintenance men, Murray Ereth and Maurice Lardy, over the summer in keeping our indoors and outdoors beautiful and functional. Murray has been working at the monastery for 26 years. Maurice has been working here for 12 years. Thanks for all you do!