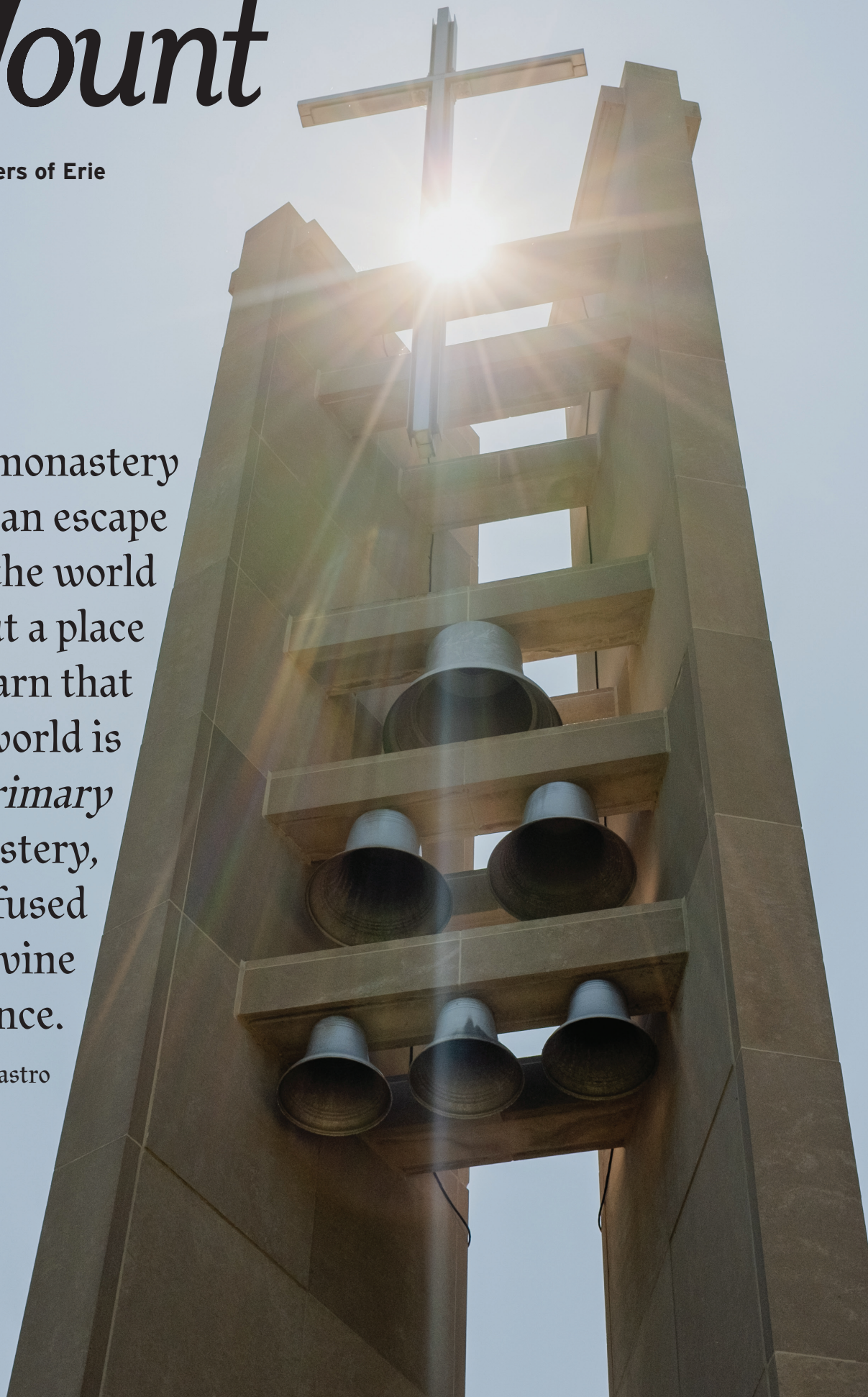


the Mount

Benedictine Sisters of Erie
Winter 2025

The monastery
is not an escape
from the world
but a place
to learn that
the world is
the *primary*
monastery,
suffused
with Divine
Presence.

—Robert Nicasio



the Mount

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The Mount Magazine

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The Benedictine Charism is to seek God in the communal life and to respond in prayer and ministry.

Corporate Commitment:

The Benedictine Sisters of Erie and Oblates commit to being a healing presence and a prophetic witness for peace and justice and to climate conscious living. We will decrease harmful patterns of consumerism and work with others to create systemic change needed to meaningfully address the climate crisis.

Thank you to **Printing Concepts, Inc.**, for the printing of this issue of *The Mount* in Erie, PA.

Welcome to another issue of *The Mount*! We have much to share with you in this issue—and even as we went to press, there was more to add. The SBA Alumnae pages were complete, and then I had the opportunity to snap this photo of two members of the St. Benedict Academy Class of 1949. Sister Norma Jean Kingsley (left) and Allene Kraus enjoyed dinner at our Benefactor Appreciation Event on November 6. You can read more about SBA Alumnae on pages 30-31. The bonds among women who graduated from SBA continues to amaze. It was a formative experience that connected many of them to the Benedictine community for life.



Our cover photograph is by Washington, D.C.-based photographer Jennifer Packard who is the sister-in-law of Joe Deboe, a member of our maintenance staff. When she travelled to Erie, Joe invited her to come see the monastery and fortunately she brought her camera. Jennifer works on Capitol Hill as a multimedia specialist/photographer and is an active member of Photographers Without Borders and the Women's Caucus for Art of Greater Washington, D.C. You can find more of her work at Jennifer Packard Photography, jenpackard.com.

I'm excited about our guest columnist for this issue, a friend of our Benedictine community, Erie native Dr. Robert Nicastro. Robert is the executive director of the Center for Christogenesis, christogenesis.org. You can read his piece, "Ever Ancient Ever New, Rediscovering God in an Unfolding Universe," on pages 6-7.

Don't miss the feature on the new Benedictine Peacemakers program on pages 8-12. Applications are open for the 2026-2027 cohort, please help us spread the word about this opportunity for young women to immerse themselves in Benedictine spirituality, life, and work for a year.

There is much more inside — spirituality, beauty, archives, work for peace, oblates, and more. Enjoy, and thank you for walking with us!

Linda Romey OSB



On Pause

Sister Lynn McKenzie, President of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica, was in Erie on July 11 to install Sister Diane Rabe as administrator of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. The Erie community, with sixty-four sisters, is a member of the Congregation.

The Benedictine Sisters had convened this past Memorial Day weekend to elect a new prioress to succeed Sister Stephanie Schmidt, who completed her five-year term of office on July 11, 2025. Election facilitators Sister Aileen Bankemper, St. Walburg Monastery in Villa Hills, Kentucky, and Sister Jennifer Mechtild Horner, Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana, had assisted the Erie sisters during a direction-setting weekend in April and were present for the discernment and election weekend in May along with Sister Lynn, who as the canonically elected leader of the Congregation would oversee the actual election. During the course of the weekend, Sister Lynn made the decision to pause the process prior to an actual election. "Given the complexities of the sisters' deliberations, I made the decision to pause the discernment and election process so that the sisters could continue to formulate plans before choosing someone from among their membership to lead their community as prioress," she said. While not unprecedented, Sister Lynn's decision is unusual in monasteries like Erie's that have a solid membership and multiple sisters with the gifts and qualifications necessary to serve as prioress.

Sister Diane was appointed administrator of the Erie Benedictine community for a term of one year. She will provide guidance and oversight on matters concerning monastic life, the daily operation of the monastery, and ministries. "We are heading into the land of the unknown but we, as a community, have been there before and came out the other side stronger than ever," said Sister Diane. "I expect the same to be the case in this new chapter of our shared life."

The sixth century Rule of St. Benedict is a guide for living well with God, self, and others. The sisters of the Erie monastery have been following the Rule since they arrived in Erie in 1856 to teach the children of German immigrants. As Church and culture changed, so did the monastic community. They responded to the ever-emerging needs of Erie and the world and today continue their good work through Emmaus Ministries, the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, St. Benedict Child Development Center, St. Benedict Education Center, Benetwood Apartments, Benetvision, and Monasteries of the Heart. Additionally, they continue to be a spiritual center in Erie with the monastery at the heart of their prayer and communal life and the place where they welcome guests and spiritual seekers in many and various ways.

The Benedictine community is a voice of peace and justice in our city and beyond.

Their current Corporate Commitment is: *The Benedictine Sisters of Erie and Oblates commit to being a healing presence and a prophetic witness for peace and justice and to climate conscious living. We will decrease harmful patterns of consumerism and work with others to create systemic change needed to meaningfully address the climate crisis.*

In her role as administrator, Sister Diane will guide the sisters through a yearlong time of prayer, discernment, and discussion, all the while making sure that the good works and prophetic voice of the community remain strong.

The Rule of Benedict begins with the instruction to "listen with the ear of your heart." This year will be a time of intense listening for the sisters—listening for the voice of God, to their own hearts, to the wisdom of their sisters and their tradition, and to the emerging needs in the wider world. When what is murky becomes clear, Sister Lynn will convene the community for a canonical election of prioress. "We truly believe that this time to slow down and process more deeply is something we can model for others. Our world pushes for immediate results in so many ways and often what is needed to achieve true growth and transformation is a slower pace and deeper thinking," said Sister Diane.

Sister Diane was raised in Erie and is a 1969 graduate of St. Benedict Academy. Three years after graduation, and while finishing her degree at Villa Maria College, she entered the Benedictine Sisters and was a teacher and principal before becoming the administrator of St. Benedict Child Development Center in 1991. For nearly thirty years she directed the award-winning center, growing the programs, training staff, and giving children and their families opportunities they would not have had otherwise. She left the Center in 2020 when she became subprioress of the Benedictine community. Sister Diane has also held other roles in the monastic community including Monastery Coordinator and Vocation and Scholastic Director. She continues to serve on the board of the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project.

Sister Lynn also appointed a monastic council to serve for one year, to advise and support Sister Diane. These sisters are Linda Romey, Charlotte Anne Zalot, Christine Kosin, Dianne Sabol, and Katherine Horan.



Sisters Lynn, Linda, Diane, Christine, Dianne, Katherine, and Charlotte

Benedictine Spirituality

An Ageless Oasis in a Spiritual Desert

by Colleen Leathley, OSB
with Linda Romey, OSB

Benedictine spirituality is not a spiritual practice that waxes and wanes, comes and goes, as we grow and change and mature in the spiritual life. It is a way of life, a free-standing and stable model of the God-seeking human enterprise that is based on age-old traditions and ancient wisdom. It is not a work that can be accomplished in any given period and then forgotten. It is the work of a lifetime.

—Sister Joan Chittister in *The Monastery of the Heart*

The monastery as welcoming spiritual center

For over 1,500 years Benedictine spirituality has been providing a guide to living fully and authentically. Like oases in a spiritual desert, Benedictine monasteries offer a safe and supportive physical and spiritual environment for pilgrims, seekers, and guests to rest, reflect, rejuvenate, and find support and guidance for their spiritual journey.

Our guests at Mount St. Benedict Monastery tell us that places such as our monastery are valuable and essential in today's world. They appreciate that with the challenges, uncertainty, and anxiety that daily living brings, they can come to a place that is quiet, prayerful, beautiful, and surrounded by natural beauty. They also appreciate that they find here a rich prayer life, welcoming faces, and spiritual guidance to help their bodies and souls rest and refresh.

In his Rule, St. Benedict instructs us to, "Welcome the guest as Christ." That mandate to offer hospitality and spiritual nourishment to guests is a ministry that our community believes in with all its heart. We actively seek to fulfill it as best we can.

We have guests who have been regularly visiting the monastery for years—some for as many as thirty years—for their annual stay in a hermitage or guest room. They know their way around the monastery, the prayer and meal routine is familiar, they recognize many faces. They have come home.

Others walk gingerly through the front doors for the first time, unsure what to expect or even why they've come. Whether they will be participating in one of our spiritual programs or prayer services, making a private or directed retreat, taking time out to refresh and reflect, or receiving spiritual guidance, the vast majority leave feeling refreshed and reassuring us, "I'll be back!" As one recent first-time retreatant told us, "Thank you so much for a wonderful retreat experience! I still feel the sense of peace that settled over me in the monastery. And everything in my regular life looks a little different now. I think even (my dog and cat) have noticed a change for the better in me!"

Spiritual programs and retreat offerings

We liken this kind of rich experience that so many guests have at the monastery as drinking from the spiritual well, and we believe offering this space to seekers is central to our life and ministry as Benedictine sisters. That is why some of us, along with

a few collaborators, are offering more planned spiritual opportunities at the monastery including spiritual retreats and programs.

We offer shared *lectio* during Lent and Advent each year. Shared *lectio* is a slow, meditative, opening to God in a communal setting. The format is to begin with a time of quieting ourselves, then listening to Scripture, group chant or song, and time for sharing. Usually 12-15 persons join us, choosing to come to only one session, or two, or all three.

The word *lectio* is Latin for "read" and it is a daily practice in the monastery. If you stay with us, you'll hear the "*lectio* bell" ring at 5 p.m. indicating a time of quiet when each sister and guest can do their personal *lectio*, slowly reading scripture or listening for the voice of God in



Lake Erie seen from the
Benedictine Sisters' Glinodo Center.



Sister Anne McCarthy, bottom left, leads retreatants at a monthly Stillpoint Contemplative Retreat at Glinodo Center, across East Lake Road from the monastery.

music, or in art, or in nature. There are as many ways to do *lectio* as there are ways for God to speak to us.

Stillpoint Contemplative Retreats have a forty-year history in the community and currently take place once a month on Saturday mornings with a hiatus in June and July. These three-hour retreats are based in Christian and Buddhist contemplative traditions and include periods of contemplative sitting and walking as well as chant and meditation.

If you are within driving distance of the monastery, either of the above options are open to you. We do post a suggested donation amount for them if you are able to help support our costs, but we won't turn anyone away for lack of funds.

For those of you who may not be local but would like to experience a longer, programmed retreat at the monastery, we will once again be offering a Holy Week Retreat from March 31-April 5, 2026. Reservations will open in early 2026.

The retreat is built around the traditional services of Holy Week that are celebrated in the monastery every year—Holy Thursday service, Tenebrae on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, Good Friday Peace Pilgrimage and Veneration of the Cross, and the Easter Vigil on Saturday night. In addition, there will be input and opportunity for sharing and creative expression.

Information about these and other opportunities is included in our monthly email newsletter, the Good Zeal Zine. Visit eriebenedictines.org to subscribe.

Virtual and other spiritual opportunities

We realize that for many people traveling to Erie to visit the monastery for spirituality programs and retreats is not possible. Our online monastery, Monasteries of the Heart, offers virtual spirituality programs and retreats. It's an online community we founded nearly

fifteen years ago and more than 30,000 people have been members at one time or another. Monasteries of the Heart usually offers about six Zoom retreats and programs each year and shares weekly prompts for *lectio* as well as psalm reflections and ideas for good works. You can sign up for the weekly email at monasteriesoftheheart.org.

Other spiritual opportunities both at the monastery and online are offered through our Benedictine Oblate program (see page 22) and the new Benedictine Peacemakers program (see page 8). Each of these programs is built around the needs of its respective members but they also open some of their programming to wider audiences both in Erie and online. These opportunities are also included in the Good Zeal Zine and posted on our website.

Wherever you are on your spiritual path, we invite you to come and drink from our spiritual well, join with fellow pilgrims and seekers, and find solace, sustenance, and support for your spiritual journey.

Visit eriebenedictines.org and sign up to receive our monthly Good Zeal Zine for notice of all spirituality opportunities. Scan the QR code to learn more about spirituality programs. We look forward to sharing hospitality—either onsite or online—with you.



Sisters Christine Kosin, Jean Wolbert, and Dorothy Stoner offered a prayer experience, Lament: An Opening to Hope, in October. They invited the Mercyhurst University Liturgical Dance Ensemble, under the direction of C. Noelle Partusch (in back), to bring movement into the experience. More than 120 persons gathered in the monastery chapel for this opportunity to lament together. "A prayer of lament," explained Sister Dorothy, "cries out forcefully, expressing confusion, pain, anger, and frustration—the feeling of abandonment of the one who is praying. It expresses our deep sorrow in suffering and injustice. The language is not polite; it is direct and raw. Nor does the prayer end with answers or assurances that 'all will be well.' It does, however, offer just a glimpse of hope as it acknowledges the presence of God." It seemed fitting to offer this prayer of lament and hope as we move into the final months of the Holy Year proclaimed by Pope Francis before his death, as a way to help us refocus our observance of "Jubilee 2025: Pilgrims of Hope."

Ever Ancient Ever New

Rediscovering God in an Unfolding Universe

by Robert Nicaastro
Guest Columnist

The God many of us learned about in childhood, a distant deity dwelling somewhere “up there,” occasionally intervening in human affairs from beyond the clouds, is dying. Perhaps this is part of our lament today. We feel unmoored, sensing that the old certainties no longer speak to what we experience in our depths or witness in the vast, evolving cosmos science reveals. Yet this death might be the very doorway to hope, for what is dying is not God, but a limited image that could no longer contain the mystery.

Alfred North Whitehead warned that “religions commit suicide when they find their inspiration in dogmas.” We see this suicide happening slowly around us, not in the death of faith as such, but in the exodus of people who know there must be more than rigid formulas can express. These are not people abandoning the sacred; they are people whose souls have outgrown containers too small for their expanding experience of the divine. The question before us is not whether God exists, but whether we can find language adequate to the God we are actually encountering: in the depths of our own consciousness, in the intricate emergence of life through billions of years, in the mysterious ground

that holds all existence. As Whitehead insisted: “Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science.” This is not a call to abandon tradition, but to allow tradition to become alive again, as dynamic as the universe. What might such a living tradition look like? What language can we use that honors both our ancient wisdom and our contemporary experience?

Where Whitehead pointed to the need for a religion open to change, Paul Tillich pressed this further with his startling claim that “God does not exist.” He did not mean there is no divine reality, but that God is not a particular thing existing alongside other things. God is not the “big guy in the sky.” Rather, God is the depth dimension of existence, the ground from which the cosmos unfolds and to which all life converges. When we speak of God as “ground,” we point toward something more intimate than any external deity could ever be: a divine presence not separate from the world but woven through its very fabric.

This theological insight finds its lived expression in Benedictine spirituality. When Benedict spoke of finding God in all things, of treating every person as Christ, of seeing the sacred in the mundane work of daily life, he was pointing toward this same truth: the divine is not elsewhere, waiting for us to escape this world, but here, now, in the depths of matter itself. The monastery is not an escape from the world but a place to learn that the world is the primary monastery, suffused with divine presence.

The Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin brought this Benedictine vision to revolutionary proportions. He recognized that God is not found in opposition to matter but through matter, emerging from “the heart of matter” and, indeed, as the very heart of matter. The divine is rising up through evolution, becoming more fully conscious in human consciousness, drawing all creation toward greater complexity, greater unity, greater love. We are not separate from this process. We are the universe becoming aware of itself, the means by which God comes to fuller self-realization.

This vision of divine immanence—God in the sinews of existence—echoes across the great mystical traditions. As Meister Eckhart proclaimed:

"God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground." The Sufi mystic Mansur al-Hallaj experienced this same truth: "I saw my God with the eye of my heart. God said, 'Who are you?' I said, 'I am You.'" These voices remind us that divine intimacy transcends religious boundaries, offering a shared horizon of meaning. The great mystics across all traditions have discovered that we are entangled with the divine in such intimate mutuality that God participates in our becoming even as we participate in the divine life, neither complete without the other. This is not pantheism in the simplistic sense of "everything is God." Rather, it is the recognition that nothing exists independent of the divine, that the sacred interpenetrates all reality as fundamentally as quantum fields undergird matter.

This vision addresses both our lament and our hope. We lament because we sense that dogmatic religion, frozen in categories forged centuries ago, cannot speak to our experience.

We lament because the world seems increasingly fragmented, violent, disconnected from its dynamic and unifying center. But here is the hope: if what we lament is the death of an inadequate image, then perhaps what we are living through is an invitation into a more expansive experience of the divine. One that embraces evolution, values the Earth, honors materiality in all its forms, celebrates diversity, and recognizes the sacred in all things.

Yet this raises a concern: if God is not a person "out there," have we lost something essential? Tillich insisted that the personal symbol of God remains vital, not because God is literally a person, but because "only a person can heal a person." We need to experience the divine ground as personal, as loving, as beckoning us toward fuller life. This is not contradiction; it is paradox. God is both the cosmic depth sustaining all that is, the personal presence that calls each of us home, and the future drawing all matter toward greater love and wholeness.

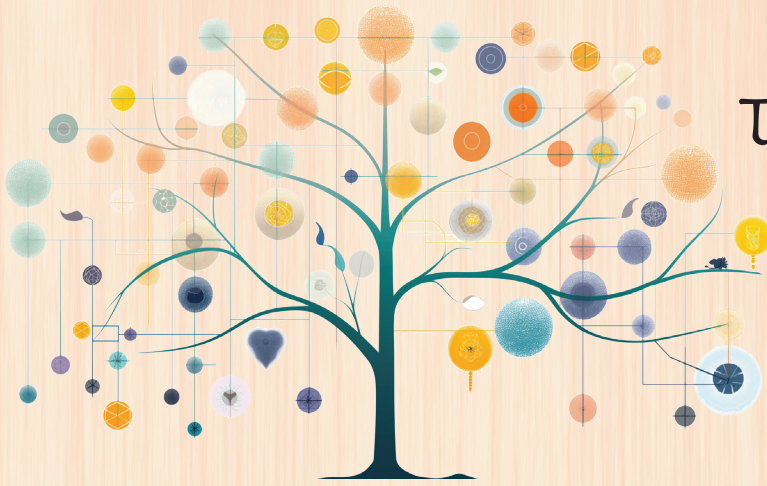
This moment of theological renewal, this invitation to reimagine how we speak of not so much the transcendent but transcendence, is precisely what the notion of jubilee signifies. If what we



Robert Nicastro, Ph.D., is a theologian, teacher, and writer whose research explores the convergence of religion, science, and technology. His work specifically focuses on how emerging technologies are reshaping human identity, planetary consciousness, and the future of religious thought. He also serves as Executive Director of the Center for Christogenesis, where he advances an integrated vision of science and spirituality rooted in the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

lament is the death of an inadequate image, then jubilee is the freedom to discover God anew—not merely a year marked on a calendar, but a threshold moment when we are released from old bondages and invited into new freedom. This Jubilee Year calls us to freedom: freedom from images of God that diminish our capacity as bearers of the divine, freedom to embrace the God we are actually experiencing, freedom to name what we know in our depths. We live in a universe ablaze with divine presence. Matter at its core is holy. Evolution is both how God creates and how God becomes. Consciousness emerging from stardust is a miracle beyond comprehension.

The Benedictine vision, the discoveries of evolutionary science, the wisdom of mystics across traditions—all converge on this liberating truth: we do not need to flee the world to find God. We need only to wake up to the sacred depth already present in everything, including ourselves. This is not a small God but an infinite God, not a distant God but an intimate God, not a static God but a God ever ancient and ever new, drawing all creation toward the fullness of love.



THE BENEDICTINE EVOLUTIONARY TREE

by Linda Romey, OSB

The Benedictine Peacemakers program is an experiment in seeing the evolution of Benedictine life as biologists see the evolution and growth of all life. Our Benedictine evolutionary tree, like the biologist's tree, is a "succession of ramifications," to borrow from Jesuit theologian and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This ramification, the growth of new branches, reflects a "continual expansion and deepening of consciousness" because life seeks meaning and purpose rather than superficial change.

Our 1,500-year-old Benedictine tree is rooted in God—and at the outset Benedict tells us his teaching will bring us back to God—and it is this rootedness that pulls us forward and fulfills our purpose. The Benedictine wisdom tradition is the trunk of a great, ancient tree that nourishes human reflection, thinking, and understanding and opens us to God. While our twenty-first century lives bear little resemblance to sixth century living, the core of Benedict's teaching continues to guide seekers today.

The purpose of Benedictine life is more profound than sharing spirituality and values. It's more than maintaining a monastery where sisters live and guests come. It's even more than sponsoring important ministries and doing good works. Yes, these all grow out of seeking God in community, but they are not the reasons this tree has continued to flourish for more than fifteen centuries.

Benedictine life is about individuals choosing to grow into God alongside other individuals who want to do the same, guided by this tradition. It is about seeing how this desire for God, implanted deep in human hearts since the beginning of time, is what informs our being and guides our thinking and acting.



Emily Brandt, Erin Falk, Melissa Pfeifer, and Benedictine Peacemakers program director, Michelle Scully.

Monastic life is about supporting each other as we persevere on our own journey of *conversatio*, of becoming more Christ-like in our being, our relating, in our daily living, and in our response to the needs around us. Vowed monastics have formally committed their lives to this pursuit. Many others also make this commitment to follow Benedict's way to God without taking canonical vows, oblates for example (see page 22), living in their own homes rather than a monastery. Benedictine Peacemakers is an invitation, specifically for young women, to spend a year growing into God with a monastic community. It is a new branch growing on this ancient Benedictine tree.



Erin oversaw Pay-What-You-Can farmer's market stands through the summer in her ministry with Groundwork Erie.

The Peacemakers Branch

The evolutionary and spiritual growth questions are: What does the world need now? What is missing? What needs addressing now to support the good of humankind and the earth? At one point in our history, it was education for the children of German immigrants. It was an academy for young women on Erie's east side. It was founding a soup kitchen and an art house. It continues to be working for peace and justice and women's equality. The list goes on. But what might God's creation need today?

For 120 years the sisters at St. Benedict Academy (SBA) formed young women who, to this day, witness the impact of Benedictine education. The SBA experience supported the full human value of women and stressed the importance of creating strong community along with a commitment to the greater good. But SBA closed in 1988 as the ways of the world changed. The

sisters changed, too, but they also stayed the same, rooted in the Benedictine tradition.

We asked ourselves, “How do we actively introduce young people to that tradition in ways that are relevant now?” We thought about the resources we have to offer. Well, there are extra bedrooms in the monastery. There are sisters with whom to pray and live in community. There are those who can offer formation in Benedictine spirituality and there is a monastery with many spaces for quiet reflection. There are ministries that need to be done, and peace and justice for which to work. How could we put those resources to work to offer support and space in new ways for new generations who seek God now?

The pieces began to fall into place and in June three young women moved into the monastery. Thus began their yearlong journey of seeking God immersed in the monastic community as part of the Benedictine Peacemakers program. Next May, the community will bless them and send them off, hopefully more grounded in their spiritual seeking and knowing that the monastic community will continue to uphold them in prayer and welcome them back to the monastery to visit at any time.

The Experience

The women in the Peacemakers program live in the monastery. They join sisters and guests in chapel to pray the daily Liturgy of the Hours, and they take their meals in the dining room. These times together are central to the monastic life to which they have committed for this year. They may be asked to read Scripture at prayer, and they are on a dish team—it takes a team to do dinner dishes for fifty or sixty people each evening.

A weekly reflection day is part of the program. It’s a day for formation classes (see page 12 for curriculum), personal reflection, and some extra silence. Three retreat weekends, focused time away, are scheduled throughout the year.



Woodturner Sister Audrey Steff teaches Melissa her craft as part of an art-as-meditation experience.



Erin, Sister Lucia Surmik, and Emily at a rally in Erie.

The women spend four days a week in their ministry. Additionally, they are active in local efforts promoting peace and justice, including climate justice. They network with other non-profits in Erie and go out with new friends. They make a conscious effort to create community among themselves and contribute to the good of the monastic household. Outside of their basic living needs—food and shelter—that are met by the monastic community, they live on a small monthly stipend, the same as the sisters do. And they socialize and have fun with each other and with sisters and guests.

Melissa Pfeifer is from Hays, Kansas, and splits her time between Emmaus Ministries and the Erie Spiritual Coalition, ministries that serve vulnerable populations; Erin Falk is from Buffalo, New York, and works with Groundwork Erie where she coordinates the Pay-What-You-Can farm stands; Emily Brandt is from Newton, Kansas, and has used her skills as a social worker at the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House.

Michelle Scully, coordinator of the Peacemakers program, and I recently had a conversation with Melissa, Erin, and Emily about their experience in the program. Their wisdom follows.

Intergenerational Living

It’s hard to imagine living with more than fifty women with a median age of eighty-one until you do it. The youngest sisters who live at the monastery are in their thirties, the oldest in their nineties. Emily, Erin, and Melissa are in their twenties.

There are many gifts to intergenerational living, a way of life that used to be much more common. Today, living near grandparents is no longer a given, let alone living with them. “Aging helps us see what’s important,” Melissa said. “God is always trying to draw near. The lock is on our side. Each sister has her cross to carry [with aging]. It’s a reminder that this could happen to me, too, if I live long enough. It’s touching for me to see one sister taking another sister’s walker to her after prayer.”

Erin also spoke about the sisters’ care for each other. She admitted that she didn’t have a lot of experience with older people, and “had a little nervousness” before moving in, wondered if they were going to judge her. “But they truly don’t judge, and they have care in their heart that extends to me. I feel like we are all one



After shared *lectio*, sisters and women in the Peacemakers program offer a blessing for Mariela, Sister Linda Romey's goddaughter from Colombia, South America, who was returning home.

family, and I think that is beautiful.”

“It’s such a funny balance between being a kind of sibling sisters, like the dynamic of friends, because they sometimes get annoyed with each other like siblings would. I find it refreshing,” added Emily. “It’s just fun to chat with them and I see a kind of sassy, playful side sometimes.”

Spirituality

The conversation shifted to spirituality, a topic important to each of the young women even though their experiences of the spiritual life and their religious practices vary. While they are expected to participate in the prayer life of the community during their year at the monastery, the purpose of the program is not to impress on them any one experience of the Divine. It is to allow them space, give them time, and provide resources so they can wrestle with these deep questions of God and meaning in a supportive environment.

“I think many young people do seek some sort of spirituality or greater meaning in life, but a big part of what deters people [from mainline religious traditions] are systemic aspects of religion that implant shame and guilt and a lot of limitations,” said Emily. “It’s hard to trust when you’ve been hurt or betrayed or told that your existence is wrong. Having more of these spaces [like the monastery] is good as long as it’s about love and seeking good and God, and actually accepting others and opening your arms to whoever.”

Erin explained that for her, “the difference between spirituality and religion is spirituality is a relationship with the Divine. And I think people are looking for some type of connection with the Divine.” Like Emily, she noted that spaces like religious institutions, “come with order and structure and rules that don’t work for everyone.” She added, too, that “if there were more third spaces, and that’s kind of how I felt about this program, where you come in and work on your relationship with the

Divine and go from there with monasticism as a base, that has been helpful. I think God is always there and you just have to find what works for you.”

“Interior freedom transcends everything,” Melissa reminded us. “‘God alone suffices,’ as Saint Teresa of Avila says. I mean, Sister Michelle just has my heart when she says, ‘I don’t regret a single minute of it. I came here right after high school.’ It’s the best thing ever to have that kind of inner peace.”

“And I think that kind of choosing is radical,” added Emily.

Living the Rule

A key piece of the Peacemakers curriculum is study of the Rule of Benedict, the sixth century rule that structures the life of Benedictine monastics around the world. Michelle picked up on the comments about frustration with rules and structure in organized religion, pointing out that, “there is also order and structure and rules here in the monastery. So, what feels different to you?”

“You are accepted here no matter what,” began Erin. “It’s like, this is our way of life that we think is beneficial. But even in the Rule, it says, if this isn’t working for you, change it up a bit, so there’s openness. It’s kind of like a guideline as opposed to a rule; you have this structure and then do what works for you based off the structure.”

“This structure feels more like a daily routine and rhythm, it’s like an encouraging guideline of how to live out and seek God instead of like, rules and limitations that lead to guilt or shame,” added Emily.

“It’s common to hear someone is spiritual but not religious,” said Melissa. “But I don’t think you can really separate them. I like religion defined as what we owe to God. It’s like a relationship, like a friendship, not a one-way street. It’s not like, yeah, it’s nice to have your companionship. I’ll take all the benefits. But if you



A group of friends—(back) Starla, Sister Linda, Emily, Erin, Mariela, Rachel, Michelle and (front) Sister Anne, Tori, Melissa, and Michelle—helped Melissa celebrate her birthday with line dancing at a local venue.

need something, no, I'm not here for it. I think it is relational, and rules exist to protect relationships. And I think that's what religion gives us.

"In a relationship I want to know what you expect from me. Clarity is a gift, and I feel like that's what having a religion is. Catholicism clarifies my relationship with Christ."

In previous eras, monastic life meant strict adherence to a predetermined norm lived in complete, uncontested obedience. There were few allowances for differences of thought, behavior, diet, or dress.

New generations, including the women in the Peacemakers program, are often at the forefront of embracing new thinking. Emily brought this awareness to our conversation as she explored more deeply her experience as a teen and young adult who was sometimes shamed for not completing tasks or managing time well. "But, as someone with ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder) it's like the motivation doesn't exist," she said. As an adult and with advances in neuroscience, she has recognized that everyone's brain works differently. "There are so many reasons why someone may not be able to complete a task. I wasn't just choosing to sit there and not comply."

Which took us to deeper conversation about each one's unique relationship with God, the need for guides that are not absolute and blind rules, interior freedom, and the mental and spiritual strength it takes to know oneself and to feel comfortable being oneself in a world that still has a strong idea of what "normal" is.

Michelle offered a summary: "I wonder if there's frustration when the institutional guardrails say who is good or not, right? There is nuance in everything that comes together to create a representation of truth. And then there's the totally individualistic attitude and I think there's something in between. We need good communal discernment of truth grounded in rich histories within religion but maybe we are frustrated by who gets left out of those conversations."

"We do need guides, life can be confusing," said Melissa. "And we need honor and respect and kindness," Erin added. "Then we can coexist because we know everyone comes from different experiences."

"I'm just going to get curious about why someone said what they did instead of judging them," suggested Melissa. "And I think you can also assume a shared goal if everybody is showing up here in community, committed for a year or committed for a life," said Michelle.

On Work

"I really appreciate how much this community as a whole kind of spreads throughout the greater Erie community building-relationships and learning more about the world around us," said Emily. "It's more about living the life instead of just speaking the life in terms of monasticism and the Benedictine way of life. It's also like being the hands and feet of Jesus."

"I feel a connection with humans and the Earth, like we are one organism," Erin added. "And I think the work that I'm doing

really highlights that because we are planting trees and growing food and feeding people. The trees create canopy coverage so that it's not so hot and they are improving air quality. I'm really seeing the connection, I guess, between the earth and human life and viewing the earth as sacred."

"Work is sanctifying. We see in work where our hangups are and how we really don't want to do a lot of things. There's what we do and why we do it and how we do it. Every job can be sanctifying, just cutting a carrot or vacuuming the floor," mused Melissa. "It's humbling after some years in the work force to be like an intern again, coming into a place, not knowing the history or the relationships. I see the value of staying in the same place, like the Benedictines have, for such a long time. You become



Emily, far right, high-fives students at the Neighborhood Art House as they prepare to go on stage for their performance at the annual Taste of the Arts fundraiser.

intimate and see better how things are related. You can make more prudent decisions with this kind of perspective."

But work doesn't only happen in the broader community, it happens at the monastery in myriad ways day in and day out. "Many sisters work in the monastery," noted Emily. "Like Sister Marcia or Sister Peggy, who engage in their projects and in art, still creating and doing fulfilling things."

"The essence of community is sisters doing stuff around the monastery that's needed," said Erin, "like, Sister Mary Ellen Cummings organizing the cups to make it easier for others to find what they need even when they come to get something to drink during the night."

"I guess the larger vision of [work] is trusting that I am where God wants me to be right now. How can I use that to glorify God?" concluded Melissa.

Ongoing Benedictine Tradition

Words are important in shaping not only how we think but also how the world thinks. "Pax," peace, is the de facto Benedictine motto carved on the massive stone entrances of monasteries across centuries. This new program, and the women who choose to become a part of it, remind us of our heritage and call us to be who we say we are. They are also the living evidence



Benedictine Peacemakers program director Michelle Scully and Emily, Erin, and Melissa share their Peacemaker experience with sisters and oblates at the October Community Weekend.

that there is still value in the ancient Benedictine tree of life.

“The being who is the object of their own reflection, in consequence of that very doubling back upon themselves, becomes in a flash able to raise themselves into a new sphere,” Teilhard de Chardin writes. The course of history makes clear that new spheres will always arise. But it also assures us that we will go on, too. It is both the past and the present that make the future possible. We are the fortunate ones, those who have an experience of God and can reflect on who we are and what gives our life meaning and purpose in light of that experience. And then, trusting in the God who calls us forward to wholeness, we can witness the ongoing life of the Benedictine tradition as it unfolds and continues to offer its gifts to new generations.



Components of the Peacemakers program

Spiritual and personal formation are integral to monastic life and therefore are key components of a year spent in the Benedictine Peacemakers program. The curriculum for the 2025-26 cohort includes:

- Ongoing study of the Rule of Benedict. One facet of this study is a monthly session on one of the twelve steps of humility from Chapter 7 of the Rule.
- Presentations and discussions on topics related to faith, theology, liturgy, and spirituality presented by sisters and other members of the wider Benedictine community.
- Opportunities to learn about issues of peace and justice, including climate justice, and community organizing.
- Gatherings for faith sharing, book discussions, creative expression, and exploration of women’s issues.
- An initial orientation week, a week of closure at the end of the program, and three off-site weekend retreats during the year.

Parts of the curriculum are exclusively for the women in the program. Some gatherings are for the young women and the sisters, and other events are open to the public. This offers the program participants a chance for personal deepening and growth in and with an immediate community and a larger local community.

While broad conversations brought us to the initiation of the program, an advisory committee has continued working with Michelle Scully, Benedictine Peacemakers program director. Team members are hospice chaplain Sister Mary Ellen Plumb, Monasteries of the Heart coordinator Katie Gordon, counselor Sister Ann Muczynski, and Sister Linda Romey, coordinator of Communications and Development.

More information and applications for the 2026-27 cohort are on the website of the

Benedictine Sisters of Erie,
eriebenedictines.org/benedictine-
peacemakers or scan the QR code.
Please help us spread the word!



Centering Prayer workshop part of Benedictine Peacemakers curriculum shared with larger Erie community

Mary Dwyer (standing front) and Juan Larena offered a workshop and practice in Centering Prayer in the monastery chapel. Mary, a longtime student of the American Trappist monk Thomas Keating, gave a brief introduction to the prayer form. Mary’s husband Juan is a commissioned Centering Prayer facilitator and he led those gathered in a twenty-minute prayer session after Mary’s presentation.

the Fifth Kind of Monk

It will look different...

A slight tilt of the head is enough to make a work of art look different. Changing a single word can alter the meaning of a sentence. Waiting one second before crossing an intersection can be the difference between life and death. Such infinitesimal ripples create change because change is the nature of life. Even though we may understand the science of life as change, the reality is we work hard to pretend it isn't so. We work hard to find coherence to give some sense of stability and meaning to our daily existence.

On the cover of this issue, Robert Nicastro offers a metaphor for monastery that can give coherence and meaning amid the constant change in monastic religious life. He writes, "The monastery is not an escape from the world but a place to learn that the world is the primary monastery, suffused with Divine Presence." The metaphor, "the world is the monastery," provides a conceptual structure for a re-reading of the Rule of Benedict without negating the traditional concept of a physical monastery. And, as Robert clearly indicates, the traditional monastery is necessary as a place of learning, a spiritual center, a training ground for those who are to take spiritual teachings and practices from the monastery into the world: the Fifth Kind of Monk, oblates, and others.

For decades, facing declining membership and closing monasteries, many in religious life have been saying that religious life will continue but that it will "look different."

That phrasing presents me with a conundrum because of course it will "look different" — change is the nature of living institutions just as it is of living organisms. Is it not more accurate, in an evolutionary world, to say, "Religious life *as we know it today* is dying. What form comes next?"

The thing is, if we believe that the world is "suffused with Divine Presence," as Robert says, another evolutionary form of religious life *will* come next and it will also be suffused with Divine Presence. I find this evolutionary perspective more full of meaning and hope than simply saying it will "look different."

The entire prologue of Benedict's Rule is an invitation to those who seek to live in conscious awareness of the Divine Presence, everywhere and always. It concludes with, "Never swerving from God's instructions, then, but faithfully observing God's teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in the eternal presence."

by Linda Romey, OSB
artwork by Marcy Hall
[instagram.com/marcyhallart](https://www.instagram.com/marcyhallart)



Then the very first chapter of the Rule names four kinds of sixth-century monks and Benedict makes clear that he is writing for one kind, the cenobite, the monk who lives in a monastery. There are surely multiple reasons Benedict wrote for that one kind of monk — including because the metaphor "the world is the monastery" would not have made sense in the average sixth century concept of world.

But Benedict was a mystic, and like mystics and prophets before him and since, his vision opened pathways that are beyond the conscious awareness of most of us. He "saw the whole world in a single ray of light" as St. Gregory tells us. Benedict would have understood the metaphor, "the world is the monastery" and, I believe, the emergence of a new kind of monk based on that understanding, a monk who may be nourished by the cenobitic monastery but who doesn't live within its physical walls.

The challenge for us is to grow into the awakened awareness of Benedict the mystic, to make and follow new paths for that, too, is part of the evolutionary movement of life.

Scholars suspect that Benedict wrote his Rule over time as the monastic life developed. Today we do the same as we wrestle with the expanded vision of a monastery and a Fifth Kind of Monk. We are still deep in the process of

seeing and walking in the

Divine Presence as we discover guidelines and guardrails for evolutionary paths in our century.

Monastic life as it has been lived in the memories of those now living it is only the most recent iteration of how it has been lived across the centuries. Let us grieve and lament for what only feels like loss, but let us also rejoice in hope because the gift of evolutionary life is also ours.



More about the Fifth Kind of Monk on my Substack. Scan the QR code.
—Linda Romey, OSB

Erie Benedictines join Women Religious Archives Collaborative



Sister Theresa Zoky, far right, archivist for the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, participates in the groundbreaking ceremony for the new WRAC facility.

Women's role in shaping history—and thereby creating the world in which we live—has gone largely unheeded and often outrightly ignored until our own time. Whether looking at history through the lens of religion, politics, science, or economics, the voices of women are largely absent. In recent decades deeper scholarship and new technology in fields such as archeology, linguistics, and anthropology have made possible the revising and rewriting of histories to correct this exclusion even while acknowledging that there is no way to completely recover the full extent of what has been lost over centuries.

Women religious, including the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, are working to preserve their histories and make them accessible to future generations for research and educational purposes. The nonprofit Women Religious Archives Collaborative (WRAC) in Cleveland, Ohio, has taken a leadership role in this effort. Started in 2022, more than 45 religious congregations and communities in the U.S. and Canada are on board to house their archives at WRAC's Heritage Center. This past July, Erie Benedictine archivists Sister Theresa Zoky and Sister Janet Goetz were among those present for the groundbreaking ceremony for the planned state-of-the-art facility. Then in August, Sister Susan Durkin, OSU, WRAC Executive Director, and lead archivist Sarah Lubelski presented the project to the entire Erie Benedictine community via Zoom.

Sarah told the sisters in her presentation, "I personally feel that this [women religious] is almost a criminally understudied group of people in our nation's history. Once you start to see sisters, you can't kind of unsee them, they've been so integral to how our country was built.... And their story is really so much part of the immigrant story that is so important to American history. And I think more than ever, it's important for us to find

spaces and find ways to tell the story of how sisters have served people on the margins and that we wouldn't have an America if we didn't have immigrants and Catholic sisters who helped minister to them."

"We were pleased to be a part of the groundbreaking for this project," said Sister Theresa. "We've been working with Sister Susan, we understand the value of a well-maintained

and documented archive for interpreting and understanding our history and being able to share it with others."

Now that ground has been broken, the Heritage Center is one step closer to its projected spring 2027 completion date. "Cleveland is a short two-hour drive from Erie which gives our community an access advantage," Sister Theresa added.

In explaining how the location was selected, Sister Susan said that the idea was to create a collaborative model. "We want the availability of being able to connect to several colleges and



Sisters Theresa and Janet in the archives room at the monastery.

170 years

Legacy Community Vision

On June 23, 1856, five Benedictine sisters arrived in Erie and settled on East Ninth Street. In 2026 the Benedictine community will celebrate 170 years since their arrival. In opening an idea-generating session with sisters and oblates during the October Community Weekend, Michelle Basista, CFRE, Development Associate noted that, “anniversaries are opportunities to weave together legacy, community, and vision.” In the coming months we will be offering various opportunities to celebrate where we’ve come from and where we are going—find details on our website as they become available, eriebenedictines.org, or sign up on the website for our monthly email newsletter, the Good Zeal Zine.



St. Benedict Academy, East 9th Street, 1890

universities within a certain radius. We want to be close to an airport. We want to be close to other like institutions. And we want to be in a space where sisters have traditionally served.” Another priority of all the partners was “to be in a space where we’re going to lift up the people who reside or work in that area. We don’t want to gentrify an area, we want to be a part of a renaissance. So we landed on this space right near downtown Cleveland. We purchased the property from the Sisters of Charity of Saint Augustine, who have traditionally ministered on that space since 1865.”

While the archives of the Erie Benedictines will eventually be housed at the Heritage Center, for the time being they remain in two climate-controlled rooms on the ground floor of the monastery. Sister Mary Margaret Kraus, prioress from 1964-1978, officially established our community archive and named Sister Patricia McGreevy first archivist in 1973. “She realized the importance of history, of grounding future generations in a lived context, of providing them with insight into their roots and knowledge of how they got where they are,” said Sister Theresa. “We can’t really understand who we are let alone make good decisions in the present without some awareness of our past.”

Sister Janet Staab followed Sister Patricia as archivist, serving from 1980 until 2016. Sister Theresa Zoky began working part-time with Sister Janet in 2013 and became community archivist in 2017. Sister Janet Goetz joined her part-time that same year.

The space dedicated to archives in the monastery contains thousands of documents dating back to the arrival of the first sisters in Erie in June 1856. They include letters, official documents, school records, photographs, and also some artifacts. Pieced together they tell a story of courageous women who faced poverty, anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiment, and sexism as they struggled to fulfill their call to prayer and community as Benedictine women and their mission of educating the children of immigrants.

Scan QR code to learn more about WRAC.



Sister Joan Chittister’s Literary Archive

Erie Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister’s literary archive is a collaborative effort of Pennsylvania State University, Mercyhurst University and Mount St. Benedict Monastery. The main repository will be housed at Penn State in State College as part of the Eberly Family Special Collections Library. An influential religious and social leader, a prolific author, and an international lecturer, Sister Joan received her doctorate in Speech Communication Theory from PSU. An extensive library of her audio-visual material has already been sent there: original audio cassette and VHS tapes, as well as dozens of CDs and DVDs of her media appearances and recorded material. Copies of any of these are available by contacting Special Collections.

Hard files of her over sixty books, seven hundred articles, scores of speeches and presentations, and dozens of interviews—both print and visual—will eventually be housed in the archive. Over one hundred journals, hand-written and electronic, will also be part of the collection.

The collection will also include a full selection of photographs from Sister Joan’s personal and professional life, available as original prints and electronic scans.

The formal dedication of the Joan D. Chittister Literary Archives at Penn State was held in October 2015.

Mercyhurst University in Erie, Sister Joan’s alma mater for her Bachelor’s Degree, opened a Joan D. Chittister Archives Room in April 2014.

Mount St. Benedict Monastery has a public archive room that displays all of Sister Joan’s books and a large selection of awards and memorabilia collected from her worldwide travels. It also has a computer with access to most of her digitized material, including photographs.

Scan the QR code to read more.



a Reflection on Beauty

by Calista Robledo

On a Sunday afternoon, my partner, Kirk, and I strolled down a busy Newbury Street in Boston. On this particular Sunday, we perused the Pucker Gallery, the home of Brother Thomas Bezanson's glazed pots, and other eccentric artwork. This free gallery was packed from floor to ceiling with artwork. From pottery, to light fixtures, to paintings, the gallery was bursting with beauty.

As Kirk and I strolled along, looking for Brother Thomas's work, I recounted my own time with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie this summer. I thought about how both Brother Thomas and I found a spiritual and artistic home in Erie that led to a deeper understanding of artistic vocation for me, and for Brother Thomas, a life and legacy rooted in love of monasticism and a desire to create beauty.

I then shared with my partner a story I heard about Brother Thomas from Sister Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski. She described him as an odd but sweet fellow, as they lived in the same house on the



sisters' Glinodo property. There was a period of time when he first moved in that he was in an artistic funk. But one day, as she was driving home from work, Thomas ran up the driveway shouting, "I made a cup! I made a cup! I made a cup!" Kirk and I laughed at this story as we stumbled upon the section of the museum housing Brother Thomas's work.

From the floor to the ceiling, an array of pots, vases, cups, and bowls with rich pigments, ranging from yellows to purples and blues and greens, shone like the sun. It was an extraordinary sight. On the wall was his portrait and a brief description of his life and work. But what struck me most was a book entitled *Tales of Thomas*, published by the gallery. It was a small but rich book that explored his life story and his thoughts on art, God, and life. As I skimmed the book, I just happened to open a page to a picture of him with Sister Carolyn at Glinodo! The text accompanying the picture was the same story she told me about his exit from an artistic funk. In that moment, not only did I feel a strong sense of connection to the sisters, but I felt I was now discovering this great artist who I wish I'd met.

The book was also lined with an array of his quotes. My favorite was: "I do not know how the alchemy of changing a spirit works, but I do observe it happening and I do experience that it does not happen in isolation—no one does anything alone." And I think Brother Thomas is absolutely right. There, in this little gallery on Newbury Street, I thought of how the Holy Spirit took me from Boston to Erie, and while still in Boston, brought me back to someone who loved Erie as I now do. And when the spirit moves us an explanation is not always given, but rather experienced. This movement manifests through connections and relationships with one another, never in isolation. And I think creating art does similar things. Sometimes it just happens! We create and experience something beyond ourselves, and we share it with one another.

Calista Robledo is an MDiv student at Boston College who lived at the monastery and worked at Monasteries of the Heart and the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House this past summer. She visited a new exhibition of Brother Thomas's work at Pucker Gallery in September.

About Brother Thomas

A native Canadian, Brother Thomas Bezanson graduated in 1950 from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and in 1968 received an MA in Philosophy from the University of Ottawa. In 1953, he began working as a potter and six years later entered the Benedictine Monastery in Weston, Vermont, where he spent twenty-five years as a potter.

A few years after an influential journey to Japan, Brother Thomas felt the need for greater artistic freedom and, in 1984, he left Weston Priory and then accepted Sister Joan Chittister's offer to become an artist-in-residence with the Benedictine Sisters in Erie, where he shared his life and art for twenty-two years.

Brother Thomas's elegant forms are completed by a vivid array of glazes, which he created from natural materials. His work has been exhibited in more than fifty solo exhibitions and his pots are held in public collections including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Internationally, museum collections in Japan, Canada, England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Israel, and the Vatican also include his works.

Pucker Gallery in Boston holds the largest and most diverse collection of his work. Mount St. Benedict Monastery also has a large collection of Brother Thomas' pots displayed in a specially crafted space in the front parlor and in display cases around the monastery. Throughout his life, Thomas would gift the sisters with pottery from each firing. Brother Thomas is pictured with Sister Christine Vladimiroff who was prioress when the front parlor display case was designed in 2006 in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of the community. Brother Thomas died in 2007 and Sister Christine died in 2014.





Peace is our calling

Promoting clean energy

Erie Benedictine sisters, oblates, and women in the Peacemakers program participated in two “SunDay” events during a week of actions in September celebrating the unstoppable rise of clean energy. Benedictines for Peace (BFP) Coordinator Sister Anne McCarthy explained, “We showcased the power of the sun and wind, the energy sources that can power our world without pollution.” Sister Jacinta Conklin piloted one of two pontoon boats in the bay that sent a message to the fossil fuel energy’s Shale Insight Conference held that same week at Erie’s Bayfront Convention Center.

The events celebrated the sustainable and clean future of renewable energy in contrast to the fossil fuel industry of the past that is expensive, dirty, and harmful to all life. BFP was one of several cosponsors of the events. Rental of two pontoon boats was made possible by a grant. Land-based demonstrators gathered with signs and chants to spread their message.



Learning de-escalation and nonviolence

Benedictines for Peace core committee member Juan Llarena (standing) assisted BFP Coordinator and Pax Christi USA Ambassador of Peace Sister Anne McCarthy in leading a day-long workshop at the monastery on nonviolence training from a Benedictine perspective.

“Across the country and the world, tensions are escalating. What can you do in a moment of crisis, at a local demonstration, or in an ordinary conversation, to lower the volume, remain calm, and create peace?” Sister Anne asked participants. The answer was offered in presentations of background information, practical tactics for de-escalation, and practices grounded in Gospel nonviolence interspersed with role-playing activities.

This workshop was offered as part of this year’s Benedictine Peacemakers curriculum.



2025 Prophet of Peace



The Benedictine Sisters named Erie native and activist Art Leopold their 2025 Prophet of Peace during evening prayer on September 21. Many family and friends were present for the ceremony when Sister Diane Rabe presented him with the award. Art has been a healing presence and prophetic witness for peace and justice for more than thirty years, involved in leadership, advocacy, organization, and hands-on efforts to create a more just city and world.

Over the course of a thirty-year career, Art served as Vice President at Erie Computer and Stargate and later as Western Pennsylvania District Manager for Open Range, where he helped expand internet and communication services across the region for rural communities. Art's commitment to justice and peace began during the Vietnam War era and has remained a lifelong passion. His peace and justice advocacy includes: serving as Chairperson of CARE—Citizens Against Racism in Erie; Erie County United, advocating for fair wages, women's rights, voting rights, tenant protections, and broader civic engagement; AmeriMasala Festival crew; Unitarian Universalist Social Justice group and much more. Thank you, Art!

Connecting with Pax Christi USA

Sisters Anne McCarthy and Colleen Leathley, along with community friend Jessica Sun and Monasteries of the Heart coordinator Katie Gordon are pictured at their display table at the Pax Christi USA National Conference held in Detroit in July.

The theme was, "Reclaiming the Power of Nonviolence in a Broken World." In addition to strong keynotes and workshops, powerful liturgies, public art, and a shared protest, the Erie delegation reconnected with PCYAC, the Pax Christi Young Adult Caucus, who had just held their annual retreat at Glinodo in June, where they enjoyed an evening by the lake with sisters, Peacemakers program participants, and oblates (below).

"Many stopped by our table to share how much the Erie Benedictine community inspires them, especially all the contributions that Sisters Joan Chittister and Mary Lou Kownacki made to the entire Pax Christi community through their writing and speaking over many years. It was a beautiful weekend as we were reminded of how deep and vast the legacy of peace and nonviolence is in the Catholic tradition, and what a significant role the Benedictine Sisters of Erie have played in its development," said Katie.



Sisters Speak Out action

Erie Benedictine sisters, oblates, and Benedictine Peacemakers program participants joined in a nationwide action, "Sisters Speak Out Prayer & Public Witness for Immigrants and a Just Economy," organized with the Sisters of St. Joseph and Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

The demonstration, sponsored by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, was in response to mass and unlawful deportations, dismantling of public institutions and environmental protections, and the budget debate that includes sweeping cuts to Medicaid and SNAP programs.

The local action took place on June 24 on the corner of 18th and Ash Streets near the Erie County Prison where ICE detainees are imprisoned. "We want to draw attention to the increase in funding for anti-immigration actions, which is why we chose this location for our prayer vigil. The Erie County Prison rents beds to ICE and has immigrants housed in jail cells," said local organizer Sister Anne McCarthy.



Summer activities at Glinodo Center



NAH holds day camp at Glinodo Center

"This is the fourth year that the Neighborhood Art House (NAH) offered a Day Camp program at Glinodo, and it gets better every year!" said camp coordinator and NAH Community Art Director Sarah Everett. "We're grateful to have the support of staff and volunteers and the Benedictine Sisters to make this week of alternative learning opportunities possible."

The day camp gives Art House students a chance to enjoy activities outdoors including making art, theatrical movement, archery, sign language, nature exploration, and swimming.

The fifty-one students, ages seven to fourteen, had lunch each day in the monastery dining room, across East Lake Road from Glinodo. The sisters enjoyed having the lively children join them for lunch and the food service staff made sure to have popular foods—hotdogs, mac and cheese, pizza—ready when they arrived. Sister Pat Lupo, on staff at the Art House, and Sister Marcia Sigler, were among those who led activities at camp.

Goat Fest 2025 — great crowds, great fun!

What began as a natural way to clear invasive species along Seven-Mile Creek on the lakeside property of the monastery has become a summer favorite for goat friends and fans.

Goatherd Jen Zeitler of Let's Goat Buffalo returned again this year, offering two educational sessions for Goat Fest guests. Goatherd Julia Taylor of Rosemary and Pine Farm in Albion, NY, and goats from each farm were also with us this year.

Michelle Scully, Program and Events Coordinator, explained, "This year as well as our usual nature art, games, and snacks, we added the Regional Science Consortium who offered a hive making activity and Therapy Dogs United who brought dogs that children (and adults) could pet. Guests often want to pet the goats but because they rub against poison ivy that is not recommended."

The story book trail, a children's book posted progressively at twelve spots along the Seven-Mile Creek trail, featured the book *Platty's Perfect Day* by local author and artist Heather Cash who was present to talk with visitors.



Farm to School students visit Glinodo

Before the goats finished their time at Glinodo, a group of schoolchildren from Erie's Farm to School program paid a visit. The program engages students in hands-on gardening and culinary activities in order to connect them with fresh, healthy food and create enthusiasm for growing food and caring for the natural world. The field trip to Glinodo Center and learning about the goats broadened their perspective.

Molly Tarvin, Mercyhurst University Sustainability Coordinator, shared with students about the goats' effect on soil health, and led the students in a soil sampling activity. Sister Marcia Sigler offered an art activity utilizing objects from nature.

Stephanie Ciner, local urban farmer who owns Wild Field Urban Farm and is a friend of the Benedictine community, and Doreen Petri, project manager of Farm to School and a previous recipient of the Benedictine Sisters Prophet of Peace award, accompanied the students.

Requiescant in Pace

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." — John 8:12

Sister Paula Burke, OSB

Perpetual Monastic Profession January 3, 1959

Died June 18, 2025



Sister Paula Burke died on June 18, 2025. She was born in Erie on January 29, 1937, to Thomas and Bernadette Brand Burke, their only daughter among five sons. They named their daughter Marilyn Ann and baptized her in their home parish, Holy Rosary. Marilyn attended St. Benedict Academy and shortly after graduation in 1954 she entered the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. As Sister Paula, her name in religion, she made her final monastic profession on January 3, 1959.

Sister Paula taught grade school at St. Stephen and St. Joseph in Oil City, St. Gregory in North East, St. Michael in Fryburg, and St. Joseph and Sacred Heart in Sharon. She loved teaching the younger children and even after leaving teaching she remained attentive to the needs of children. In 1970 she completed her bachelor's degree in elementary education from Mercyhurst College. After leaving education she began working in various aspects of food service, first at St. Benedict Academy, then Mount St. Benedict Monastery and Glinodo Center. She also spent several years as a manager at Smuggler's Wharf in Erie.

Sister Paula's gifts served the community in other ways—in the 1980s she was part of Fools on the Hill, the community's clown ministry. She continued developing her skills as a mime and for many years contributed creatively to liturgies and other events. Sister Paula loved the outdoors, and her long walks doubled as care for the earth as she regularly collected litter along East Lake Road in front of the monastery.

She transitioned to internal ministries in 1991—in the monastery Business Office, groundskeeping, and as a community driver. Sister Paula retired from active ministry in 2020.

Sister Mary Ann Luke, OSB

Perpetual Monastic Profession August 26, 1989

Died July 23, 2025



Sister Mary Ann Luke died on July 23, 2025. She was born October 2, 1932, in North East, PA, and baptized at St. Gregory Thaumaturgus Parish, North East. Her parents were Geraldine (Ish) Luke and Charles Luke. After graduating from North East High she earned her Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry and biology in 1954 from Villa Maria College and began teaching at St. Benedict Academy that same year.

Mary Ann first entered the Benedictine Sisters in June 1959 taking the name Sister Mary Matthew but left religious life two years later. A popular teacher who instilled a lifelong love of science and nature in her students, she continued to teach science and mathematics at the Academy until 1964.

After twenty years of single life during which time she worked twelve years as a crown and bridge technician for dentist Dr. Joseph O'Leary in North East, six years as an insurance administrator, and two years at the Erie Community Food Bank, Mary Ann returned to the Benedictine community in 1984 and made her perpetual monastic profession on August 26, 1989.

After her return to the community, Sister Mary Ann joined the staff of Pax Christi USA. She also held numerous positions in the Benedictine community including at Benet Press, administrative assistant to the prioress, writer for *The Mount* magazine, and aide in the monastery library.

Sister Mary Ann was a pre-digital photographer who had a great love of nature and a special fondness for birds and cats. Her keen intellect and sharp wit were immediately obvious to anyone who conversed with her. She was a broad and avid reader and an aficionado of crossword puzzles who could make the *New Yorker* magazine puzzle look easy.



Erie Benedictine Oblates

a monastic presence for today's world

Scan QR Code to learn more.



Oblate Co-Directors: Oblates Susan Jenczka and Darcy Johnson

New oblate co-directors

The Erie Benedictine community welcomed two new oblate co-directors at a celebration during their October Community Weekend. Oblates Susan Jenczka (left) and Darcy Johnson accepted the responsibility of serving as leaders of the 250-member oblate community. They will count on the collaboration of the Oblate Leadership Team and the support of the sisters. "My vision for the oblate community going forward is that we continue to grow as a vibrant, inclusive, and spiritually grounded circle that lives Benedictine wisdom in the world. Together, may we deepen our connection to the Erie Benedictines, nurture one another's spiritual journeys, and bring the values of peace, justice, and hospitality into our communities and daily lives," said Darcy.

Reflecting on an antiphon in the Daily Readings, "In your wisdom you understand all things; keep my spirit steady and willing," Susan shares that, "Vision is an evolutionary concept to me and even the grandest visions I have ever had generally become more useful if I let go and let

God, as the saying goes. I too am evolving and a steady and willing spirit feels, especially at this time in life, like the most reliable resource for me, in order to best serve the community."



Community welcomes four new oblates

At Evening Prayer on Saturday, October 25, four people made their first Oblate Commitment. As part of the ceremony, Sister Diane Rabe gave each one the Erie Benedictine Oblate pin. They are (l to r) Pat Maslow Firem, Chardon, OH; Ben Fitzgerald-Fye, Auburn, NY; Kathleen Kutz and Mary Rita Groucutt, Erie, PA. They joined 64 Oblates who renewed their commitment during the ceremony.

Candidates become Oblate Initiates



Four oblate candidates became Oblate Initiates and began their second year of formation on October 25. Mary Bojan, State College, PA, and Shannon McHenry-Miller, Powell, OH, are pictured above. Not able to be present were Michele Carignan, Coventry, RI; and Laurie Smith, Erie, PA.

Thank you to outgoing oblate co-directors

Sisters and community offered a heartfelt thank you to outgoing oblate co-directors, Oblate Joanne Cahill (left) and Sister Annette Marshall. Joanne broke ground for the Erie Benedictines as the first lay oblate director. She and Sister Annette focused on developing leadership, increasing formation opportunities, and developing practices to aid potential oblates in discernment, initial monastic formation, and integration. Under their leadership the Oblate Enrichment Series began and the six-member Oblate Leadership Team was formed. They have offered their support to incoming co-directors Susan Jenczka and Darcy Johnson and will remain active in the community. "This was a labor of love, building on the good work that has gone before us. Our oblates bring the monastic

presence of our Erie community into their homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods. I am so grateful to have been called to serve in this leadership role

that offered me the opportunity to use my gifts in service to this community that I love, and to discover new gifts and longings as well," said Joanne. "I am very grateful for the time I have been able to work with our oblates, to learn about them and from them. We are blessed by their presence, their prayer, their action and their commitment," added Sister Annette.



Oblate workshop during Community Weekend

Thirty-eight oblates attended discussion groups on the Friday before Community Weekend, "Erie Benedictine Oblates—A Monastic Presence for Today's World." The day included large-group sessions as well as five breakout groups that met in different spaces throughout the monastery. The group above discussed the Spirituality of Aging. Other groups were What is a Benedictine Pastor?, Living into Practices while Living Life, the Corporate Commitment, and A Little Bit of *Lectio*: Encountering God's Word.

Requiescant in Pace

Jeannette Rodenbough

Died Feb. 12, 2024

Linda Logwood

Died Aug. 29, 2024

Jessie Ferriols

Died June 6, 2025

Frances Rizzo

Died Jul 28, 2025

Marilyn Randolph

Died Aug 15, 2025

Lyta Seddig

Died Aug 31, 2025



appear on the front/home page of our news media. Drawn to the words "a healing presence and a prophetic witness for peace and justice" in the community's Corporate Commitment, she offered two examples of individual healing stories in the scriptures, Luke 5, the healing of a paralytic, and John 11, the raising of Lazarus, to illustrate that Jesus heals with the help of the community. Michelle also considered another story, John 8, the woman caught in adultery, as an example of how Jesus de-escalated a violent scene moving bystanders to a nonviolent response and peaceful exit.

The Oblate Enrichment Series provides ongoing learning, community building, and a deepening of monastic commitments.

Oblate news

Oblate Kelly Adamson is a 2025 Benedictine Spiritual Direction Graduate. She recently completed the Spiritual Direction program at Benet Hill Monastery, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Oblate Joanne Cahill has begun a new Substack, Blessings On The Journey. Find it here: <https://joannetcahill.substack.com/>

Oblate Jackie Burns, retired Deacon and prison minister, writes about her work with the Kairos Christian Weekend for women who have been impacted by incarceration. Scan the QR code to read her reflections.



Oblate Enrichment Series

Oblates and sisters at the monastery and a virtual public audience heard Michelle Sherman, program director for nonviolence and campus outreach at Pax Christi USA, present, "Peace in our world at this time: how can we be a healing presence?" on September 20.

Recognizing that we easily get bogged down in the violence, division, and misinformation that characterizes our news today, Michelle began by reminding listeners of the good news that is also happening all over the world but that does not

Generosity Shaping the Future

Fundraising Updates

Monastery renovations

Through the generous support of foundations and donors, we renovated the south wing of the second floor of the monastery to meet the increased healthcare needs of sisters. Renovations included hard surface flooring and grab bars in the hallway, double-acting doors and grab bars in bedrooms, and a second nurse's station. The sisters began calling the hall Raspberry Lane—the picture tells you why! “Thank you to all who helped enable these renovations. Handrails are an added aid and the flooring is easier to keep clean. It all looks beautiful!” said Sister Elizabeth Oettel. Pictured are Sisters Phyllis, Rosanne, Rose Ann, Audrey, Elizabeth, Therese, and Susan who live on “Raspberry Lane.”



New health care equipment

SBA Alumna Christine Froelich Tatalone, '66, responded to our request for help purchasing a Hoyer lift for the health care unit at the monastery. Chris realizes how important the lift is, her sister Jeanie, who had ALS, needed one. When Chris visited this summer, health unit staff Jill (left) and Andreina (right) showed her the new lift. Jill said after meeting Chris, “You could tell how much she loves the sisters and how happy she is to help.” Chris looks forward to June 2026 when her class celebrates their 60th reunion.



Thank you Wabtec

The Wabtec Foundation awarded the Benedictine Sisters a \$5,000 grant at their May Board of Directors meeting. Community Labor Coalition Fund members Matt Fedak and Mike Sadler, representing the Local UE 506 Union whose members work at Wabtec's Erie plant, present the check to Sister Therese Glass. The sisters were selected to receive the funds, Mike told Michelle Basista from the Benedictine Sisters Development Office, because “You supported us during the 2023 strike with your peace walks. That’s what made us think of you all. You do great work for our community.”

Grant for Benedictine Peacemakers program

Funding provided through a \$5,000 grant from the Catholic Foundation of Northwest Pennsylvania will benefit the Benedictine Peacemakers program. Peacemakers is a new program that offers young women an opportunity to live in the

monastery for a year, explore monastic spirituality, and serve in ministry (see page 8). Pictured are Lisa Louis, Catholic Foundation, Sister Linda Romey, Michelle Scully, director of the Peacemakers program, and Michelle Basista, CFRE. Thank you, Catholic Foundation! The Catholic Foundation is the only community foundation in northwest Pennsylvania guided by Catholic values and investment principles.



A Legacy of Gratitude and Love

Ways to Make a Planned Gift

Whatever your connection with the Benedictine Sisters of Erie, your planned gift supports a Benedictine future.

When Sharon Gorski Teagarden, SBA Class of 1967, looks back on her time at St. Benedict Academy, she remembers four years filled with joy. “The sisters were awesome to be around and such great teachers,” she shared. “I loved them with all my heart and appreciate the great education I gained from them.”

Life brought its share of challenges in caring for her mother and losing her husband, and Sharon often felt she didn’t have enough to give to charity. But her gratitude for the Benedictine Sisters never changed and through her estate plans, she found a meaningful way to express her appreciation.

“Because of what I received at St. Ben’s, I put the sisters at the top of my charity list,” she said. “I want to give back to the community that gave me so much.”

Sharon’s story is a reminder that planned gifts are not about the size of one’s bank account, but about values you carry in your heart. For Sharon, making a planned gift ensures that the Benedictine life of prayer and work, which has served Erie for nearly 170 years, will continue to grow for generations to come.

As she looks forward to her 60th SBA class reunion in 2027—which will be her first visit back to Erie since 1986—Sharon celebrates the bond that began in her youth and continues today. Her legacy gift will strengthen that bond, sustaining the Benedictine way of life that has touched so many lives.

Planned gifts like Sharon’s are vital to the sisters’ future and help ensure that the love and education the Benedictine Sisters have shared for generations will extend well into the future.

If you’ve ever thought about what kind of legacy you’d like to leave, consider following Sharon’s example. A gift in your will, no matter the amount, can be a powerful statement of gratitude and have impact that lives on—for another 170 years. Your legacy can help write the next chapter.



Making a planned gift allows you to support the Benedictine Sisters in a way that fits with your values and circumstances. Here are some ways you can give:

- **Bequest in Your Will**—Name the Benedictine Sisters of Erie as a beneficiary of your estate. This can be a specific dollar amount, a percentage, or the remainder after other obligations are met.
- **Beneficiary Designation**—Add the sisters as a beneficiary on a retirement plan, IRA, life insurance policy, or bank account.
- **Gift of Appreciated Securities**—Gifting appreciated stocks, bonds, or mutual funds can provide tax advantages to you while making a meaningful impact to the life and work of the sisters.
- **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)**—If you are age 70½ or older, you can make gifts directly from your IRA to the Benedictine Sisters. These gifts count toward your **Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)** and can reduce your taxable income.

Every planned gift, large or small, strengthens our Benedictine legacy. To learn more, contact Michelle Basista, CFRE, at 814-899-0614 x2281 or mbasista@eriebenedictines.org.



2025 Golf Tournament—another success!

The sun was shining and the spirit of generosity was in full swing for the Sister Mary Lou Kownacki Memorial Golf Tournament fundraiser last summer. Thanks to the support of players, sponsors, volunteers, and sisters, the event was a success both on and off the course. Golfers enjoyed friendly competition at Lake Shore Country Club, complete with contests, raffles, and a cheer squad of sisters. We raised \$56,554 after expenses in support of the sisters and their good works. We are especially grateful to our sponsors, whose generosity made the tournament possible. We thank the golfers who came not only to play, but to give back. Because of your support, this year’s tournament was a hole-in-one! We’ll see you on the greens next year – August 10, 2026!



SAVE THE DATE for Golf: August 10, 2026

2025 Prize winners:

- 1st Place Women - Bridget Whalen, Mary Anne King, Carm DeCarlo, Kelly Maslar
- 1st Place Men - Joe Askins, Don Sayban, Nick Askins, Cooper Fox
- 1st Place Mixed - Charlotte Kneidinger, Michelle Robertson, Nicholas Kneidinger, Michael J Kneidinger
- 2nd Place Women - Jo Clarke, Nancy Sabol, Cindy Liotta, Ann Daugherty
- 2nd Place Men - David Sinneway Jr, Brian Rigot, Steven Kennedy, Damian Carnegie
- 2nd Place Mixed - Todd Swanson, Gerry VanDemerve, Mike Squeglia, Jessica Wolfrom
- Longest Putt Women - Nancy Sabol
- Longest Putt Men - Don Green
- Longest Drive Women - Bridget Whalen
- Longest Drive Men - Don Sayban



Benetwood Dinner Residents of the Benedictine Sisters' Benetwood Apartments recently joined the sisters for their annual prayer and dinner to celebrate the relationship of friends and neighbors. In her welcome, Sister Diane Rabe, administrator of the Benedictine Sisters, introduced the new Benetwood manager, Darlene Winicki, to the sisters. Benetwood is a 75-unit HUD-sponsored apartment complex that the Benedictine community opened in 1981 on property adjacent to the monastery.



Congratulations to Jubilarians State Rep. Bob Merski visited the monastery with congratulatory citations for each of the 2025 jubilarians. The citations from the Pennsylvania House of Representatives thanked them for their lives of love and service. Pictured with Bob are Sisters Mary Ellen Plumb and Stephanie Schmidt, 50-year jubilarians, and (seated) Sisters Michelle Wilwhol and Veronica Mirage, 70-year jubilarians, and Sister Charles Marie Holze, 50-year jubilarian. "You model how to make decisions and take action as a community," Rep. Merski told the sisters. "You are fearless when you have the backing of your sisters, I can't thank you enough for what you do in our Erie community."

That in God may be glorified

Creative writing experience Calista Robledo, an MDiv student who worked at Monasteries of the Heart and the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House this past summer and lived at the monastery, co-facilitated a creative writing session, "Reimagining the Divine through Creative Writing," as part of the curriculum for the new Benedictine Peacemakers yearlong immersion program. Katie Gordon, Monasteries of the Heart coordinator, was the other facilitator. The session was held at The Writing Studio as St. Mary's: A Space to Create. From left, Katie and Calista.



all things



Community retreat Sister Ann Muczynski, (left) Formation Director, presents 2025 community retreat director Sister Elizabeth Carrillo, OSB, with a gift at the conclusion of the annual community retreat. Sister Elizabeth is from Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas, and her retreat was titled, “Together Unto Everlasting Life: A Benedictine Ethos of Creation Care.”



Serving families St. Benedict Child Development Center serves entire families. Alyssa Johnson, Outreach Coordinator for the Erie County Public Library, speaks at an East Coast Migrant Head Start program parent meeting. Parents were surprised to learn that a library card allows you to check out more than just books, and they were able to get immediate library cards and visit the bookmobile.

Emmaus message Artists from Emmaus Ministries created a vibrant work of art for CelebrateErie’s Chalk Walk in August. Staff member Jane Wagner coordinated the Emmaus team: Hanni Wagner-Nazario, Brigitta Anthony, and Addisyn Farr. Tyler Wassell offered drone footage. The focal point was Emmaus founding mother Sister Mary Lou Kownacki’s words, “There isn’t anyone you couldn’t love once you’ve heard their story.” It is a powerful message that would benefit us all to heed.



Community Weekend Sisters and oblates gathered for the October Community Weekend themed, “Pilgrims of Hope.” Sister Anne McCarthy offered a presentation on nonviolent response as a Way of Hope; Peacemakers program director Michelle Scully and Emily, Erin, and Melissa, the three women in the program, spoke about their experience as **Living Hope**; Oblate Ben Fitzgerald-Fye shared a summary of Friday’s oblate discussions, Sharing Hope; Michelle

Basista, CFRE, and Sister Linda Romey of the Communications and Development Office facilitated an idea-generating session on ways to celebrate our 170th anniversary next year, Celebrating Hope. The culmination of the weekend was the Oblate Commitment ceremony at Evening Prayer on Saturday, see page 22.



Our employees rock The Benedictine Sisters honored their employees with a thank you luncheon at the monastery on July 19. Themed “Our Employees Rock,” employees from every department—Business Office, Food Service, Health Services, Beautician, Housekeeping, Physical Resources, and Communications and Development, including the SBA Alumnae Board—and many of their families—attended. After a blessing, a musical ensemble (top left in photo) directed by Sister Charlotte Anne Zalot and including Sisters Anne Wambach, Colleen Leathley, Susan Doubet, and Dianne Sabol provided entertainment with a drumstick-and-table accompaniment to “Love Will Keep Us Together.”



Presentation and conversation

About fifty attentive participants—sisters, oblates, and friends—listened to Dr. Robert Nicastro, Executive Director of the Center for Christogenesis, present “Rewiring God: Teilhard, AI, and the Future of Faith” at the monastery. Following the presentation, a hardy group of seekers joined Robert to continue fleshing out questions and ideas from his work. The presentation was part of the curriculum for the Benedictine Peacemakers program. See Robert’s guest column on page 6.



Environmental award Plant it Forward Urban Forest Community Initiative, in partnership with Sierra Club, Lake Erie Arboretum at Frontier (LEAF), and its ReLEAF Initiative honored the Benedictine Sisters of Erie with the Outstanding Environmental Steward Award for Nonprofit Leadership for planting 400 native trees at their Glinodo property as part of the ReLEAF initiative and using regenerative practices such as goat-grazing to manage invasive species. Awards were presented to four organizations on June 26.



AIM Board meets The Board of the Alliance for International Monasticism, U.S. Secretariat (AIM-USA) met at St. Benedict’s Abbey in Benet Lake, Wisconsin. Headquartered in Erie, Sister Ann Hoffman is Executive Director and Sisters Christine Kosin and Dianne Sabol are on staff. Pictured are (front) Bishop Elias Lorenzo, OSB, Sisters Nettie Gamble, OCSO, Susan Quaintance, OSB, Christine, Ann, and Kathy Ulrich, OCSO and (back) Father Anastasius Reiser, OSB, Macario Martinez-Arjona, OSB, Sisters Jennifer Mechtild Horner, OSB, Dianne, and Father Augustine Kelly, OSB. AIM USA provides spiritual, educational, and financial assistance to monasteries in developing countries.

New board member

Sister Jacqueline Sanchez-Small accepted a request to join the board of Monastic Inter-Religious Dialogue (MID). MID works within the U.S. to promote conversations and understanding between monastics of different religions, especially between Catholics and Buddhists, and focuses on talking at the level of personal and communal practice. The Board will be planning a conference next July and Sister Jacqueline is happy to be involved and looks forward to learning more.



Grateful for volunteers Volunteers and sisters braved a wet Saturday to tackle some of the invasive species in the landscaping around the monastery. “We are grateful to volunteers from the Boy Scouts, Neighborhood Art House, Oblates, Master Gardeners, Master Watershed Stewards, PLEWA, and Eagles Nest School who came to help us begin to tackle the ivy,” said Sister Pat Lupo, long-time environmental advocate.



NASS

National Association
of Secretaries of State

Award to community In August the Benedictine Sisters of Erie were awarded the Margaret Chase Smith American Democracy award for political courage by the National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS) for standing up to accusations of voter fraud two weeks before last year’s presidential election. Erie was a swing county in a pivotal state and the allegation — that no one actually lived in the monastery where more than fifty voters were registered — went viral. The award will be presented in January 2026 at the NASS winter conference in Washington, DC.

Musical leadership Sister Charlotte Anne Zalot, former member Marilyn Schauble, and Sisters Anne Wambach and Susan Doubet (l to r) provided the music for daily Mass and prayer sessions at the RCRI (Resource Center for Religious Institutes) National Convention, “Pilgrims of Hope,” in Dallas, Texas, in October. There were 550 persons in attendance, including the new CFO of the Erie Benedictines, TJ Gustafson. The conference focus is the financial, legal, and property concerns of religious communities.



Tabling at Pride on the Bay The Benedictine Sisters hosted a table at June’s Pride on the Bay event at Liberty Park in Erie. “We had so many wonderful conversations with attendees, hearing their stories and sharing ours. St. Benedict Academy alumnae were happy to find us, as well as oblates and other friends. And, we made some new friends,” said Sister Linda Romey. She hosted the table with Michelle Scully, Program and Events Coordinator for the community.



**St. Benedict Academy
Alumnae Association
Newsletter
Winter 2025**

St. Benedict Academy: a legacy of women's empowerment

Have an address change? Story to share?
Idea to highlight your class in the newsletter?
Email Linda Romey, OSB, Communications Office
lromey@eriebenedictines.org

"We'll always come to thee again, when alma mater calls."

Class of 1969 at the monastery

Nine members of the SBA Class of 1969 joined the sisters for prayer and lunch at the monastery the end of August. Sister Diane Rabe, a member of the class, was there to welcome her classmates.

They enjoyed a tour of the monastery and a visit to the gift shop and reminisced with two of their teachers, Sister Rosanne Loneck (Home Economics) and Sister Phyllis Schleicher (French)—a couple of the girls actually remembered a few words from French class to greet Sister Phyllis.

After lunch they visited Glinodo Center—which they knew as Camp Glinodo—to see the invasive-species eating goats who spent a month eating their way through plants and vines that are harmful to the woods along the creek.

"We'd love to see more class groups at the monastery," said Michelle Basista, Development Associate. "Join us for a weekday lunch, an evening meal, or Sunday after liturgy." Contact Michelle at the monastery, 814-899-0614 ext 2281.



Class of 1973 at the monastery



Members of the Class of 1973 visit the monastery:
Susan West Minarich,
Kathryn Kaiser
Klaphor,
Joyce Double
Wickles,
Sister Rosanne
Loneck,
Mary Beth Whitby
Veshecco,
Tina Krasinski Delio.

**Mark your calendars now:
The 2026 SBA Spring Luncheon is Sunday
March 22, 2026 at Erie's Ambassador
Banquet and Conference Center.**

**Class of 1966 60th Reunion is June 6,
2026, at the Lake View Golf Club in
North East. Contact Mary Joswig,
mezjoswig@aol.com**

Class of 1976 50th Reunion

The Class of 1976 is planning a 50th reunion on Saturday September 19, 2026, at Lake Shore Country Club in Erie. Classmates only for this reunion, Lassies! We'll have cocktails and hors d'oeuvres at 5:30 p.m. followed by dinner at 6:30 p.m. Invitations will go out next year. Please email Nancy Szcztukowski Cross, ncross120@gmail.com, or Karen Kuchcinski Sonney, ksonney@roadrunner.com, if you or your group can offer a sponsorship for the hors d'oeuvres.

On Sunday, September 20, we will go to Mount St. Benedict Monastery for liturgy followed by coffee, sweetbreads, and conversation with some of the sisters who taught at SBA. Help us spread the word, and please forward updates of emails or addresses. Let's make it the most attended reunion in our history! The picture at right was taken at our 40th reunion.



Class of 1975 at the monastery

The SBA Class of 1975 joined the sisters at the monastery for liturgy followed by coffee and sweetbreads on Sunday September 21 as part of their 50th reunion celebration, following a Saturday evening gathering at Calamari's in Erie.

They offered a litany of thanks to former teachers, Sisters Phyllis Schleicher, Rosanne Loneck, and Dorothy Stoner. "Thank you for the life lessons (Lori Snell Honard); for being there during our high school years! (Anna Dodick Aicher); for a great education (Sharon Czulewicz); for all that you did then and all that you do now (Karen Lilly Dombrowski); for being a guiding light (Meg Habas Morris); for all your love! (Judy Bulishak Goddard); for all you instilled in us (Sharon Plumb Sparacino). Sister Elizabeth Adams is a member of the Class of 1975.

After coffee, they toured the former SBA building which has been St. Benedict Education Center since the year after the school closed in 1988. While the students are different, adults working to find employment and become self-sufficient and new immigrants learning English and how to navigate in a new country, SBA still supports education and self-improvement.

SBA Alumnae Association Board of Directors



Members of the St. Benedict Academy Alumnae Association Board meet regularly to plan fundraising activities that benefit the Benedictine Sisters and their ministries as well as social events for SBA Alumnae. Pictured are Sue Chase, '82, Sue Zill, '65, Darlene Kerstetter, '82, Sister Rosanne Loneck, '61, Sheila Warner, '73, Katie Young, '87, and Cheryl Zingelewicz, '65.

Sister Rosanne taught many of the Board members and recently invited them to join the sisters for midday prayer and lunch. "In so many ways in my life, in my work, and in how I treat people, I pay it forward because of the way Sister Rosanne treated us. I took all four years of Home Economics just to be with her," said

Darlene. "We didn't need a guidance counselor, we went to Sister Rosanne," added Sue Chase.

In response Sister Rosanne said, "You never know how you impact others. Sometimes it's the smallest thing that makes the other person feel better. I'm overwhelmed at hearing the difference I've made in the girls' lives."



Let us pray for SBA alumnae who have passed into eternity.

Virginia Matz DiBacco '53
Betty Jane Bules Reynaud '56
Patricia Grugin Buckel '54
Sharon Lefaiver Carlin '61
Barbara Orbanek Ahlgren '60
Sister Paula Burke '54
Carol Przybyszewski Scott '56

Nancy Sitter Freeman '59
Shirley Ponzy Szyplik '49
Rose Marie Sarnowski Fries '54
Marilyn (Linda) Randolph '60
Mary Ann Smith Hughes '51
Christine Visosky '59

2025 Scholarship Winners

The SBA Alumnae Association is pleased to announce 25 scholarships of \$300 each were awarded to relatives of alumnae who will be attending Catholic grade or high schools for the 2025-2026 school year. Funding comes from monies raised at the Annual Spring Luncheon and Cash Bingos.

Sophia Pitcher, Mercyhurst Prep, by Karen Kuchinski Sonney, '76 • Robert A Merski, St George School, by Marie Chmielewski Merski, '71 • Ariel Cephas, St George School, by Kim Fontecchio Hardner, '73 • Macy Bowes, Mercyhurst Prep, by Anne Kuna Shiel '79 • Davion Edmond, Cathedral Prep, by Angela Vincent '83 • Emilia Roach, St Jude School, by Margaret Nies Hinkel '74 • Amelia Hopkins, St Luke School, by Sue Hewitt Perry '74 • Calvin Dunbar, St Luke School, by Carol Holdnack '76 • Christopher Murphy, St Luke School, by Patricia Volk Murphy '61 • Kayley McCall, Cathedral Prep, by Patricia Zimmerman Flagella '65 • Anna Patterson, Bishop Fenwick High School, by Anne Luddy DeLuca '72 • Laina Drabic, Mercyhurst Prep, by Mary Lou Marshall Chimenti '74 • Casey Wagner, Cathedral Prep, by Nancy Fessler Ruffa '73 • Amelia Italiani, St George School, by Patricia Kearns Italiani '66 • Tanner Catrabone, St Francis High School, by Kathleen Welch Wozniak '72 • Karley Zielinski, St George School, by Patricia Engel Zielinski '66 • Luna Sophia Weaver, Our Lady of Peace School, by Nicolette Maly Azicri '68 • Kylie Carutis, Cathedral Prep, by Connie Capozziello Watt '74 • Michael Clark, St George School, by Kimberly Caldwell Marini '84 • Alexandra Tolhurst, St Mary Magdalene School, by Patricia Stull D'Annibale '69 • Robert Markley, St Jude School, by Sandra Pulinski Veidheffer '72 • Isabella Robbins, St Stephen's Catholic School, by Christine Hemmis Kaschak '69 • Hadley Dombrowski, Our Lady of Victory School, by Karen Hogenmiller Krahe '66 • Eden Nies, Cathedral Prep, by Maureen Nies Hubert '73 • Jenna Meyer, Mercyhurst Prep, by Nancy Olsen Veshecco '66

Benedictine ✦ Sisters of Erie

Mount Saint Benedict Monastery
6101 East Lake Road
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<<title>> <<first_name>> <<last_name>> <<suffix>>
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Please alert Heather Cloutier, Benedictine Sisters Development Office, of any address changes. Call 814-899-0614, ext. 2573, or email hcloutier@eriebenedictines.org. If you prefer not to receive a print copy of *The Mount*, please let Heather know. Current and past issues of *The Mount* are available on our website at eriebenedictines.org/good-work/mount-magazine.html.

Memories of Camp Glinodo

In the previous issue of The Mount we ran a photo from the 1950s of one of the cabins at Camp Glinodo. We asked if any of you could tell us the names of those cabins which were replaced in the late 1960s with the Timberlodge. Several readers responded, including Elaine Berthold Migchelbrink, SBA Class of 1960, who was able to send us her picture taken in front of one of the cabins that was clearly named "Zhonta." Sally Wolbert Michalski sent us her memories of attending Camp Glinodo in the early 1950s. Her cousin is Sister Jean Wolbert and they are both from Oil City, Pennsylvania, where the Benedictine Sisters taught for many years. A shortened version of her reflections follows. We also heard from Donna Geiger Villa, SBA Class of 1954, who remembered Netab and Bidabon, and Mary Ellen Dahlkemper who went to Camp Glinodo in the 1960s. Thank you all for sharing your memories.



The camp grounds seemed enormous and always smelled of newly mowed grass. To get to the lake there was a wooden staircase down to the rocky beach. The water was cold for swimming and the lake bottom rocky unless you ventured out a little. There was also "seaweed" to contend with which wrapped its slimy self around your legs.

Some days we played in the creek where the water was even colder than the lake and the rocks slippery—it would have been considered wasteful to go in the water with your white tennis shoes.

In the center of the property was the flag circle. In the evening we gathered on blankets around the flagpole and

sang songs about Glinodo and the "sisters so sweet." Ghost stories were told. At the end of the sing-a-long taps was played and the counselors sang, "Now run along home and jump into bed..."

Activities were archery, theater, and maybe volleyball. I was too inexperienced to join any of these. I wanted to work on crafts, and what I dreamed of doing was a making a lanyard but I was either not old enough or adept enough at braiding so I reverted to reading.

There was a circle of hedges in front of Bidabon and after supper the counselors would read Nancy Drew books! Oh my, I was in heaven. I was not sure if I had read Nancy Drew before that, but I fell in love. I couldn't wait for story time.

Often in the evening there would be a game of hide and seek, maybe it was called Run Sheep Run, in which the entire group of a certain age was sent off into the woods and then try to sneak back to base without being caught. Even though I didn't get it, I enjoyed this freedom to run in the semi-tamed property.

I look back at camp with great affection. I am thankful to my mother and to the sisters for providing such a pleasant week of camp. Camp at Glinodo was a great experience.

Glinodo Days by Sally Wolbert Michalski

When thinking about my education with the Benedictines at St. Joe's in Oil City, I smile. I am grateful to all the sisters who taught me (well, maybe there was one who was a bit too tough) and the effort they made to make my life a pleasant one.

Somewhere around age ten (1952), I was asked if I would like to go to Camp Glinodo on the shores of Lake Erie. It was run by the Benedictine Sisters. I think at the time that a week at Glinodo cost \$50. The younger campers slept in a cabin named Bidabon. There were inside rooms and a screened-in porch with four bunk beds where I slept and had fresh, cool air from the lake all night.

The "Big House" sat just a little way from the cabins and that is where meals were served. The sisters in their habits did the cooking. Spanish rice was a favorite of mine, served with chocolate milk.