

Lisle Benedictine Women

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Sacred Heart Monastery

June 2018



Just a closer walk with thee

Message from the Prioress...



“Just a closer walk with thee, grant it, Jesus is my plea. Daily walking close to thee let it be, dear Lord let it be.”

(Refrain from an American Folk song.)

You will read about our beloved Sister Mildred in this issue. She was a rock, a powerful woman of faith and prayer. She understood her fragility. We knew her goodness.

We all knew her favorite song was *“Just A Closer Walk With Thee.”* We sang it often as our opening at Vespers. On my part, I witnessed Sister singing prayerfully these lyrics of this song by heart as in her aging situation she was less and less likely to see. Sister listened at Vespers to the rest of the prayers but always chimed in with this song. Somehow in December of 2017, in my heart and hers too, we felt the end was near.

For some time after December, she still came to Vespers. It was at this time and during the times she could no longer come, that the lyrics of her favorite song began to speak to me more profoundly. I not only thought of Mildred but I found myself before the Blessed Sacrament praying that prayer during my evening contemplative time before the Lord. It became my mantra as I began to realize how much I wanted a closer and closer relationship to Jesus also. Why did I want it? Because the Lenten season challenges us to intentionally grow our relationship with the Lord. After all, isn't that one of the reasons we have the season of Lent- to do what we can to more fully appreciate Jesus' love for us, to allow ourselves to be changed, to become more like Jesus. When we work to embrace that challenge, Easter becomes real.

So I say thank you to Sister Mildred for gifting me the words to that song and her modeling of being Christ to others.

Life, death and Resurrection happen quite often at Villa St. Benedict. Between the family, staff, and caregivers - I call them care companions - we are able to witness and take part in many dying moments. While it is difficult, it is also rewarding. We see many being the face of Christ among us.

Our faith tells us that God gave His life that we might all journey to heaven to experience that Resurrection promised us where we will be embraced by the God for whom we have asked for “a closer walk with Thee.”

Sister Mary Bratsosky, O.S.B.

May She Rest in the Peace of the Lord



Reflection on the Life of Sister Mildred (Lillian) Slabenak, OSB

Sister Mildred Slabenak was born in Cicero, Illinois on January 16, 1920, the sixth of seven children born to Frances and Frank Slabenak. As good Catholic immigrants from Moravia in Czechoslovakia, her parents decided to baptize her Ludmilla after the holy grandmother of good King Wenceslaus of Bohemia. However, when she started school, Ludmilla sounded too “Czesky” so her name was translated to Lillian.

Lillian attended Our Lady of the Mount School in Cicero. The Benedictine Sisters from Lisle staffed the school and she was very fond and impressed by the Sisters. She often spoke about the kindness and patience of Sister Adalbert and Sister Mary Bernard, the choir directress who made her responsible for putting away the music sheets and keeping the cupboards in order. Sister Albina gave instructions on cleaning the sacristy and asked her help in arranging the flowers for the altars. This was indeed a privilege for Lillian, who loved working with the Sisters. Helping Sister Albina gave her

opportunities to get away from doing tasks at home ... “Sorry Mom, I promised to help Sister in Church.” Lillian knew her Mother would never compete with the needs of the Sisters!

When Lillian graduated eighth grade in 1934, she found herself really lucky to be going to Sacred Heart Academy in Lisle. During her time in the Academy, she became an Aspirant, actively thinking about becoming a Sister. She liked what she saw as the Sisters prayed, observed silence and seemed joyful in their composure. At this young age she began her serious discernment and she credited her pious Mother’s prayers for her religious vocation.

Soon after graduating from the Academy Lillian entered the Formation period and as a Novice received her religious name: Sister Mildred. Her consecrated life became real when she pronounced her Benedictine vows in 1941.

Sister earned her Bachelor’s Degree in Education from DePaul University in Chicago and through the years was sent to various Parochial Schools staffed by the Lisle Benedictine Sisters: St. Michael’s in Chicago, St. Mary of Celle in Berwyn, SS Cyril & Methodius and St. Mary’s Assumption in Joliet, St. Thomas and St. Peter’s in Fort Worth, TX, and Holy Child in Prague, OK. Her final mission was her home parish, Our Lady of the Mount in Cicero, where she spent forty-two years: first as a teacher, then principal, plus nineteen more years in parish ministry. Her stability in the parish along with her personal witness brought about a peaceful approach to change, especially

welcoming Hispanic arrivals during the transition from a predominately Czech Parish.

Her parish ministry blossomed and included bringing Communion to the sick in homes, hospitals and nursing homes, driving those who needed to get to doctors' appointments, maintaining the sanctuary and altar linens, beautifully decorating the altar with fresh flowers for Sundays and feast days, grocery shopping and cooking for the Fathers at the rectory (we heard she knew her spices and was a gourmet cook) and writing impressive reflections about those who died, congratulatory thoughts for anniversaries and thank you letters to those who were of service or gave donations. Because she knew the people she served so well, the flare in her writing was personal, heartfelt and included her clever words of humor.

One of the Sisters shared an example of how Sister Mildred would liven up daily living. During an approaching snow storm, the Superior told the two of them to get up at 4:00 a.m. to shovel snow which was about to barricade the parish convent entrance. This was a physically strenuous job that would break into a good night's rest. However, with Sister Mildred making wise cracks, the heavy job was made a memorable delight.

For her closing years here at the Monastery Sister Mildred was well known for her quick wit and for her eagerness to tell the fantasies of her dreams which she would recount in detail, most of which had unfinished endings. She loved music and played Mexican music for herself in the evenings. She liked to sing and harmonize but found it impossible as she grew older. She was very fond of Fannie May Chocolates and her bedtime routine was to have two pieces of chocolate

before she thanked God for her good life here every night.

Her final hours came gradually as her body weakened and her voice was almost mute. It was Saturday evening, April 28th, 2018 as the Sisters were singing God's praises at Vespers, the office of Sunday of the 5th week of Easter, that Sister Mildred saw the light of God's glory. As her Benedictine Community learned of her final breaths they surrounded her with united hearts and petitioned God to receive her with a joyous welcome to the new life promised to faithful servants. As Benedictine Sisters, may we never forget our link with the communion of saints, and trust, that now with full voice Sister Mildred, too, is singing the Benedictine psalmody of the Divine Office as she harmonizes with the Angels and Saints in the beauty of choral acclaim of our merciful Savior.

-Sister Christine Kouba, OSB

More Reflections ...

"One of the gifts of being in family and or community is to witness love in action and Mildred did that for me and others did that for her.



It was July of 2017, Sister Mildred's last living sibling Angie Kec was dying. Fortunately, we have an accessible

van so we were able to take Mildred to visit her. It was a most loving environment to witness the caring relationship between Angie's daughters, their husbands and Sister Mildred.

A few months after Angie's death Sister Mildred was at a point where she needed to be fed.

While many assisted her, one day I went to our St Walburga Care Center and found Sister Benita feeding Mildred, as "she wanted to do something."



-Sister Mary Bratrsovsky, OSB

"Sister Mildred truly lived a life of prayer. One morning I came to her room in tears. She wasn't looking at me but could immediately sense something was amiss. She suggested a trip to the chapel where we prayed to our Mother Mary and sat in absolute yet comforting silence. She was always telling me to have faith in the Lord in times of great distress."

-Marissa Tran, CNA

"If there was ever a friend who was an example of the consecrated life, that friend would be Sister Mildred. First, there is a sense of humor. Able to translate the mundane and the monotonous into a joyful event, Sister Mildred teaches us about holy love. Second, there is always a vision of life. Able to speak and sing about God, Sister Mildred teaches us about how to be a child of God. Third, there is always a confidence that God is in charge even when we are not sure where we are going. Only able to whisper in the last few months of her life, Sister Mildred teaches us to look forward to heaven."

-Rev. Becket Franks, OSB

Lord, we are off to a new beginning. We ask You to create within each of us a new spirit and a new heart. We will make every effort to make this beginning special, by being mindful of Your Presence.

In so doing:

* We will be free of all fear and become more confident in all we say or do.

* We will be able to accept and understand ourselves and others.

* We will be a positive influence on each other and promote peace, love and joy.

When we come to realize any success, it will be because we remembered You, O Lord. Amen.

Sister Mildred Slabenak, OSB

Sacred Heart Academy Alumnae

We are searching for all of our Alumnae. If you received this issue of the LBW, but did not receive the March *Echo*, or invitations to our October Homecoming, you are on our mailing list, but not coded as a Sacred Heart Academy alumna.

Please help us update our records by contacting Beth Hemzacek at ehemzacek@shmlisle.org, or send a note to Benedictine Sisters attn.: SHA Alumnae 1910 Maple Ave Lisle, IL 60532.

Homecoming will be Saturday, October 20th at Villa St. Benedict. Invitations will be mailed in August.

Treasured History and Tradition

Sister Barbara Ann Svec, OSB

Spending time reading different documents, letters, etc. in our Archives is a very interesting venture. I recently re-read a piece titled "Remembrances of a Postulant in 1909" and written by Sister Mary Coletta Novak, OSB. It is an enlightening description of a pioneer Sister's life.

"I entered the convent in 1901 in the old Convent in Chicago, located on 18th St. and Paulina. I was about the 40th member to come. Our lives there then were quite rigid by today's standards. Great stress was on poverty, silence, prayer life and mortification, plus strict obedience and practices of penance for the least transgressions. Humility was mostly cherished and practiced. Union with God was very easy with the silence and faithful practices we practiced. Handling of articles noisily was looked down upon. Silence, as spiritual books quote, is the best measure of union with God. During the day, after the signal for silence, after recreations allowed which was sparse, only talking in a whisper was prescribed and practiced.

Here are some ways we practiced poverty. For washing clothes - which we did by hand, rubbing the clothes on the washboard - we used aprons made from burlap. Calico aprons were frail for such rough work and wore out sooner. We used only kerosene lamps in the dormitory, and for the night we were to have the light lowered. At the rising bell in the morning the one nearest the lamp was to make it "teeny" brighter for us dressing. Every corridor had one kerosene lamp and for the night it was allowed to give a small light for the corridor. We had one general bathroom

with only four commodes, and this room was way down in the basement.

There were oodles of examples of practicing poverty. Every pin, every piece of thread is to be picked up and saved. Soap, oh, we received a bar of soap only once in three months. For the washing of clothes also we were taught, and had to be very saving. For meals we were also very saving. We had fruit for special Feasts, I can say not more times than five or six times a year. This was some home canned fruit when we could buy very cheaply and can ourselves. The peelings were made into jam; not a speck was wasted. Sugar was saved also. Sweets we got only for St. Nicholas and Christmas and very sparingly. For spread for breakfast only very cheap molasses or that jam from peelings. Once a week we got tallow made butter. For lunches only real hard dried bread we had gotten free from the baker. On washdays we were allowed molasses on our lunch bread, no

other days. Drink, we had only roasted barley for coffee, or cocoa shells cooked were to be our cocoa. Tea was also served for supper."



Sister Mary Coletta Novak, OSB

Tuesday Night with the Sisters

Four years ago, we began an evening program called *Tuesday Night with the Sisters*. On the second Tuesday of the month, we gather in the Chapter Room with residents from Villa St. Benedict and guests from the local community for a presentation and discussion.

We invite you to join us for *Tuesday Night with the Sisters*. The programs begin at 7:00pm, and usually last one hour. Here's a look at our schedule for this year.

2018 Theme: *The Diversity of Benedictine Life – how sisters, monks, oblates and lay people live their Benedictine Life*

April 10: Monastic Prayer

Let's take a look at and appreciate the prayer life of monastics.

Presenters: Sisters Mary Bratrsovsky, Christine Kouba, Sharon Marie Stola.

May 8: Stability and Environmental Stewardship: Think Global, Act Local

Jean-Marie Kauth will describe her work with environmental stewardship at Benedictine University and elsewhere and discuss the connection with the Benedictine hallmark of stability.

Presenter: Jean-Marie Kauth, PhD

June 12: What Makes a Homily Good?

Homily means "dialogue." So, let's really talk.

Presenter: Father Becket Franks

August 14: LISTENING: "He who has ears, let him hear" (Mk 4:23; Mt 11:15)

Most of us spend considerably more time each day in listening rather than in reading writing or speaking, yet we listen at only 25%

efficiency. To truly implement the Benedictine values of hospitality, justice, respect and stewardship, we can benefit from learning very specific steps to increase/improve our listening skills.

Presenter: Cindy Power

September 11: Peace on Earth: Exploring the call of Pope John XXIII.

The anniversary of September 11th is a painful reminder of how far we are from peace on earth. Join oblates of Sacred Heart Monastery as we explore Saint Pope John XXIII's call for peace on earth in his 1963 encyclical "Pacem in terris" and celebrate our own prayer service for peace throughout this entire planet we call home.

Presenters: Jane Doyle, Beth Hemzacek, and Cathy Lentz

October 16: The Great Silence

In this age and culture of Twitter storms and constant outrage, we could benefit from the wisdom of St. Benedict regarding Restraint of Speech. This presentation examines the value of silence in a well-lived life.

Presenter: Chris Fletcher

November 13: "Bridge or Barrier? Mary and Christian-Muslim Relations"

Moving through early, medieval, and modern times to travel across Western Europe and the Balkans to the Middle East and India, this talk will explore how Mary's role in Christian-Muslim relations has constantly shifted from bridge to barrier and back again.

Presenter: Rita George-Tvrtkovic

Updates will be posted on our website www.shmlisle.org and our Facebook page.

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We are especially blessed by the generosity shown by Villa St. Benedict residents
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We sincerely regret any omission or errors in our acknowledgements.
Please call the Development Office (630.725.6013) with any questions or corrections.

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The Sisters are blessed with many friends who volunteer their time and talent to assist us on our Board, and with our chapel and monastery needs.

They enrich our lives each day by their presence.

We are grateful, and say, Thank You.

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Benefits of making a Planned Gift, which include wills, bequests, life insurance and other estate plans:

- Provide a lasting tribute that offers ongoing support for the Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery.
- Make a gift today without spending current income or retirement resources.
- Realize income tax and future estate tax advantages while providing for your heirs.
- Become a partner in ministry with the Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery.
- Be remembered in the prayers of the Sisters each day.

The Sisters thank you for considering a bequest to the Benedictine Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery.

By virtue of our listing in the Official Catholic Directory, the Treasury of the United States has ruled that contributions to the Sisters fully qualify for federal income, estate and gift tax deduction purposes as provided within the law.

The legal title of our monastic community is:
Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart
Our FEIN is 36-2169170

Persons interested in making special gifts or bequests are asked to contact:

Development Office
Sacred Heart Monastery
1910 Maple Ave. Lisle, IL 60532
630 725-6013
development@shmlisle.org



Congratulations to Sister Anna!

Sister Anna Duong is completing her Masters degree in Clinical Psychology at Benedictine University! She is walking for graduation on June 2nd and will be counseling at Serenity House in Addison this summer to finish her clinical practice.

Sister Anna returns home to Vietnam in August. She is very grateful for your presence and prayers during her stay here in the United States. Our community will miss her gentle and joyful presence as we wish her all the best of God's blessings.

Oblates of St. Benedict

Oblates are women and men, married or single, who hunger for a deeper experience of God. Guided by the Rule of Benedict they find their lives enriched as they join others in prayer, *lectio* and work in the context of an extended community.

Our Oblates meet on the third Sunday of each month at 2:30pm. For more information, please contact Sister Karen Nykiel, OSB at 630-725-6049 or at knykiel@shmlisle.org



Spiritual Renewal

We welcome you to our colorful, spacious campus, and a sacred space called Sacred Heart Chapel for private prayer and daily Mass. Available for a short stay for quiet, reflective time, our guest house is located in the woods near St. Scholastica Cemetery.



You can meet us, share your story, we can tell you ours.

Should you be interested, call (630.750.6010), or email us at mbratrsovsky@shmlisle.org for available guest house opportunities.

Queen of Heaven Monastery

Sister Agnes Knapik, OSB

The 2017-18 catechetical year at Saints Peter and Paul Church ended with first-grader John Whittaker receiving the three Sacraments of Initiation - Baptism, Chrismation, and Eucharist. Barbara Begalla, fifth-grader, received her First Solemn Holy Communion.



Pictured (clockwise) at the May appreciation dinner are catechists Teresa Elbon, Betty Petrigalla, Sister Barbara Pavlik, OSB, catechetical coordinator, Rev. Simeon Sibenik, pastor, Betty Zombar, Rosemary Finley, and Louann Hite.



Sister Barbara Pavlik covers the food baskets she prepared for Easter. They were blessed by Father Simeon at church after Resurrection Matins. (Do you see the butter lambs?)

Father Thom Dansak spoke on the topic of repentance and reconciliation at the Preparation for Easter Spirituality Day in February.



On May 5, the Pittsburgh Archdiocesan Office of Religious Education, directed by Sister Marion Dobos, OSB, presented its **Fifteenth Annual Day of Reflection for Women** entitled “Angels Build Bridges.” The presenters told their stories of compassion, service and support for those in need, motivating their listeners to look for opportunities to do the same. The proceeds from the Basket Benefit Auction were given to local women’s shelters.



Pictured left to right in the Infant of Prague Manor chapel, the oblates renewed their promises: Sister Agnes Knapik, Laura Cucaro, Elaine Vislosky, Ruth Ann Capito, Kathy Dew, Sister M. Martha Kacmarek, Rosemary Finley, and Sister Barbara Pavlik.

Here and There... in the spirit of hospitality

Lenten Reflection at Sacred Heart Monastery

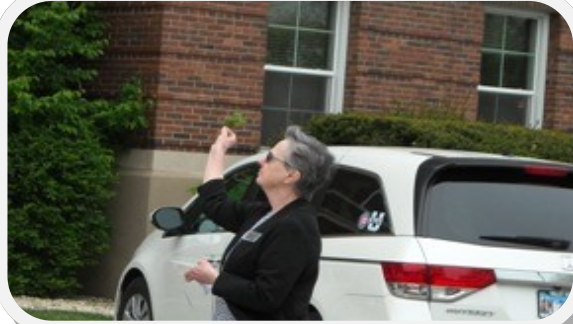
In March, Charles Brummel, retired Humanities instructor at Benet Academy, delighted us with his knowledge and humor as he led us through a closer look at Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting *The Last Supper*.



Charlie Brummel, with former Benet student Susie Shuma.

Each spring, the Sisters celebrate with their employees and volunteers, in thanks and appreciation. Here are a few of our guests from April 22nd ...





Sister Irene Jasien, blessing the roof project.



Sacred Heart Monastery. Nearly 100 in attendance.

Kathy DiCristina welcoming Luke Fredrickson to show a PowerPoint of the process of Renaissance Roofing renovating the roof of Villa St. Benedict and



Eric Shumaker holding the cross after the blessing in Chapel on January 22, 2018.

“O God, in Your wise providence You are glad to bless all human labor, the work of our hands and of our minds. Grant that all who plan to conduct business in these offices be guided with Your support.

May all who work in these offices greet one another and receive others as if they were Christ Himself. May our core values of Hospitality, Respect, Stewardship and Justice be the guiding force of all our communication and decisions.”



Blessing of the additional Administrative Offices.



A Blessing of the restored roof over Villa St. Benedict, Sacred Heart Monastery and the new Administration Offices.

“Almighty God, we ask your blessing upon this restoration project, its builders and its donors who helped Villa St. Benedict and Sacred Heart Monastery make this possible. As we bless this project with holy water, send your guardian angel, placed before this building, to bless us and all those who live and work here. May this project keep us safe from all water damage as we continue to minister to the needs of one another. May we look kindly on all who enter. “



The restored roof, cupola and cross on the roof of Villa St. Benedict and Sacred Heart Monastery.



Lisle Benedictine Women

Sacred Heart Monastery
1910 Maple Avenue
Lisle, IL 60532-2164
(630) 725-6000
www.shmlisle.org

MISSION STATEMENT

The Corporate Mission of the Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart is Hospitality. Directed by the Gospel and the spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict, the mission is based on a commitment to use time, talent and resources of the Community for those in need.

We, the Benedictine Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery, Lisle, Illinois, proclaim hospitality to be our corporate commitment. This mandate, found in the Hebrew scriptures, the Gospels, and reiterated by Benedict to be the cornerstone for our interaction with one another (Rule of Benedict, Chapter 72) and our reception of strangers & guests (RB 53), is our particular corporate response to the needs of this 21st century.

We are proclaiming our commitment to hospitality as one significant way of being

counter-cultural in the midst of global fear and mistrust. We are determined to create an environment of non-violence among ourselves that will allow our own members to experience gentle warmth and reverence for the gift each is to the community. We will create an atmosphere in which the stranger will be recognized as a guest - received as Christ Himself - the gift of God among us.

We are willing to risk and model that strangers, coming together as friends, can nourish one another in the prayerful atmosphere of cenobitic community, can share resources, can host and reverence the other as sacred. In the act of "opening our door" to the other, we in fact open our hearts - emptying ourselves of ourselves. This will be our gift to those "who knock." With open hands, we receive the gift they are to us.