

That in All
Things God
May be
Glorified



Connecting
Point

Be Uplifted by the Ordinary



Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB
Prioress

Dear Friends,

As I begin this letter, the world outside is frozen. The lake shimmers with the ice on top, the sidewalks and driveways are slippery, and the snow is bright white in the sunshine. It is cold, but it is beautiful!

We completed the Advent/Christmas season and await the liturgical season of Lent/Easter. This “in between” time is called “Ordinary Time” by the Church. Not that it is common or even normal. Nothing during this pandemic time is normal, and very little about our lives is ordinary either.

The Church calls it Ordinary because it numbers the weeks between now and the end of the church year with the “ordinal” numbers, what we called the counting numbers as children. We begin with Week 1 and will count all the way to Week 34, the Feast of Christ the King, the last week of Ordinary Time. The Feasts of the Church year are lived cyclically from Jesus’ birth to the acknowledgement of his reign as Christ the Savior in our lives.

In what way will this time be ordinary for us? When will Covid end, and what will “normal” mean in the future? Working from home will become quite “normal” for many and on-line meetings will continue. Families choosing to live with less and people retiring at earlier ages may become “ordinary”.

Many people express a deeper desire for a more simple life. Not a more basic life, but a life with no excess added, less cluttered, less encumbered. What might it be like to live with just what we need and no more? A life where we consider what others need, and understand all we have is a gift from God?

As we begin this Ordinary time, let us intentionally bring simplicity to the rhythm of our days. Let us work to bring Christ to others in ways that are never “ordinary” but always simple and daily possible: a smile, a helping hand, listening, just being present for a friend in need.

While we invite simplicity to our days, may we experience a little thawing of our hearts as nature around us begins to thaw. May you truly enjoy these winter days as we anticipate the new life of Spring.

Peace and Blessings,
Sr. Susan Hutchens, OSB

Benedictine Oblates: Who? Why? How?

By Sr. Ruth Ksycki, OSB, Director of Oblates

Benedictine oblates are Christian lay women and men who seek to enrich their lives with the ancient wisdom of St. Benedict. They associate themselves with a particular monastery and live the monastic values of prayer, *lectio divina* (reading scripture), work, hospitality, stewardship, simplicity, and sacred leisure, as their circumstances allow.

In my experience as Oblate Director for the Sisters of St. Benedict, St. Mary Monastery, I have found that those desiring to become oblates are seekers. They are seeking a way to develop a deeper relationship with God, the Holy One, and their neighbor, as well as a mindful way of serving others.

Praying the Liturgy of the Hours with the sisters, learning to do *lectio*, finding a rhythm or balance in their lives and experiencing the peace of the monastery atmosphere are gifts often mentioned as oblates progress on the way of living the Rule of Benedict in their lives.

Becoming an oblate involves this simple and straight forward process:

Meeting with the Oblate Director or Coordinator of one of our Oblate Groups who meet in cities in Illinois: Rock Island, Macomb, Peoria, Central Illinois area, Bloomington, Nauvoo and a virtual group for persons living at a distance.

Inquiry: Meeting with one of the area groups and also in special classes for those in this stage of learning. After a year or more in the inquiry stage, the person has an interview with her/his director to assess her readiness for becoming a candidate.

Candidate: This step means that the person is serious about becoming an oblate and has a desire to learn even more about walking the Benedictine path for the rest of her/his life. At the end of this time, there is an interview to assess readiness to move to the next stage.



Sr. Ruth Ksycki, OSB, in the St. Mary Monastery Chapel

Oblation: Oblation means an offering of oneself to God and promising to dedicate oneself to service of God and all people according to the Rule of St. Benedict in their current lifestyle. There is a ritual for this stage, and on-going formation continues throughout one's life.

Our Benedictine community has hopefully enriched the lives of our 100+ oblates. We are blessed to have their presence as we travel together on the path to eternal life.





*Sr. Judith Sutera, OSB, Mount St. Scholastica
Benedictine Sisters, Atchison, KS with
Sr. Ruth Ksycki, OSB, Oblate Director*

Community: We Are In It Together Highlights from Oblate Day, 2021!

During the current year the oblates have been studying the meaning of community in the Rule of Benedict. They are using the newly published book by Sister Judith Sutera, OSB: *St. Benedict's Rule: An Inclusive Translation and Daily Commentary* as their resource. To enhance their study, Sr. Judith was invited to give a presentation to them on Benedictine community at their annual Oblate Day in October. Below are some highlights she shared with the Oblate community.

Early Christians drew together in the desert because they were fleeing persecution. From their experience in the desert, they formed a community from common sacrifice based on a belief. They looked to the early Jerusalem believers who “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread as a model for Christian community (Acts 2:42).

These daily practices of community – praying together, fellowship, meals with one another – are key aspects of Benedictine life.

When considering communities, we typically think about people living in a certain geographic location. However, St. Benedict imagined a very different and more specific type of community. His community had a spiritual, emotional and physical bond that extended far beyond geographic location. It was based on the promise to God of obedience (listening), stability (living and bonding with this community) and fidelity to the monastic way of life (transformation).

The Rule of St. Benedict provides guidelines for living in community that include a commitment to prayer, discipline and humility.

Prayer: Benedictine community life is anchored in prayer. The sense of a community praying is different from an individual praying. When we pray, we know that other Christians around the world are also praying, and it brings us comfort. We are not alone.

Discipline: Benedictine practices also require discipline, which is a gradual process that happens over time. Discipline is the same Latin word as disciple which means ‘keeping to the way’. Being

Benedictine community is anchored in prayer, requires discipline and right relationship with God, others, and ourselves.



Sr. Judith

in community provides a disciplined lifestyle of prayer and reflection.

Humility: Seeing ourselves in right relationship with God, other people and ourselves requires humility. While our society puts the individual at the center, Benedictines consider what is best for the community. As we grow in humility, community helps us become who God created us to be.

For any relationship that matters, by what we do, we learn why we do it. The practice of caring for one another leads us into more understanding, and the understanding makes practice easier. Things we used to do out of fear, we begin to do out of love.

In community, the practices of prayer, discipline and humility become about God and others. At the conclusion of Oblate Day, Sr. Judith encouraged the Oblates to reflect upon:

- As a professed Oblate, what role do you play in implementing the Benedictine value of community in your life?

- What are some possible ways for you to further the Oblate model of Benedictine community as you move into the future?



Sr. Judith Sutura, OSB, is a member of the Benedictine monastery of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas. Her academic background is in psychology, sociology, counseling and monastic theology. A director for lay oblates, she also teaches novitiate courses in monastic spirituality and works with the Sophia Retreat Center in Atchison.

Interested in learning more about becoming a Benedictine Oblate? Contact Sr. Ruth Ksycki, OSB, Director of the St. Mary Monastery Oblate program at (309) 283-2106, or rksycki@smmsisters.org



Michael Sigwalt, St. Mary Monastery Oblate Inquirer

A Passion for Food Justice

While in formation for the diaconate at St. Malachy's church in Geneseo, IL, Michael Sigwalt learned about St. Mary Monastery's spiritual direction program. One of the requirements for becoming a deacon is to work with a spiritual director, and Michael connected with Sr. Catherine Cleary who became an influential person in his life. "Sr. Catherine expanded my spiritual thought processes, and challenged me to live every moment as if it were a prayer to God," Michael shared.

Following his spiritual direction visits, Michael often attended Vespers at the monastery and noted

the rhythm of the community's daily prayer practice. "Praying with the community, I began to slow down and notice the beauty of pausing during prayers, of noticing holiness in the stillness," he shared. Michael became an Oblate candidate at St. Mary Monastery in 2019, and will become an Oblate when the monastery re-opens.

In August of 2021, Michael was named director of the Geneseo-Atkinson Food Pantry. He became involved with food justice in 2012 while working at John Deere Parts Distribution in Milan, IL. Deere was celebrating its 175th anniversary, and as a member of



Geneseo-Atkinson Food Pantry

their philanthropic committee, the team was looking for a community project for employee participation. Michael chose to work with the River Bend Food Bank in Davenport and learned about their mobile food pantry.

In a mobile food pantry, volunteers work with those seeking aid in a one-on-one fashion, by pulling a wagon which the guests load with food. The mobile food pantry includes setting up a straight truck with food at a location, and the wagon facilitates getting the food to the guest's car.

That first-time mobile food pantry experience gave a face to the issue of food insecurity, and was incredibly moving for Michael. He continued to volunteer for the River Bend mobile food pantry for almost 10 years. "Helping the guests load food into their cars and hearing their stories meant so much more than donating a box of cereal at the employee entrance of my work," Michael said.

More recently Michael worked as Fiscal Manager at Freedom House in Princeton, IL where he gained experience in nonprofit accounting and administration. His next plan was to install a sustainable agriculture infrastructure on his farm in Geneseo. A lifelong learner, Michael is currently enrolled at University of Massachusetts, Amherst taking online classes in Sustainable Food and Farming.

The aisles of the Geneseo Food Pantry include neatly organized groupings of food and other household staples, fresh eggs donated by a local farmer and walk in freezers. Networking with other area food pantries, the local health food store and retailers, Michael's vision is to address the holistic needs of every guest served.

Walking through the spacious and recently renovated food pantry, Michael is grateful for the generosity of individuals and businesses who support their efforts. Reflecting on his vision for the future, Michael shared "We will never cure hunger if all we do is hand out food, so the involvement of this community is critical to our success."

2022 plans include renovating a 900 square foot resource area where guests can have a cup of coffee, use free computers, write a resume or learn how to complete their GED, read local job listings, meet with a tutor, and learn to cook or take advantage of free legal assistance. As needs arise, the food pantry will also make free deliveries, provide school supplies for school children, help with utility bills and provide other monetary assistance.

Michael remembers the spiritual wisdom Sr. Catherine Cleary taught about living a resurrected life so that everything we do is offered as a prayer back to God. He shared, "When a guest leaves our building with a box of food, the most important thing I want them to feel is a boost to their identity and a sense of hope."

The Christian mission of the Geneseo-Atkinson Food Pantry is to provide food, clothing, and short-term emergency assistance for families and individuals residing in Geneseo or Atkinson.

To learn more, visit: www.geneseofoodpantry.org.

My Journey with the Oblate Community, Macomb, IL

By Linda Jani, St. Mary Monastery
Macomb Oblate

In the fall of 1997, I attended a Busy Person's Retreat at St. Francis Newman Center in Macomb, IL. The intent of the retreat was to invite college students to a deeper spiritual life and perhaps to discern a call to religious life. Near the end of the retreat, Sr. Mary Core from St. Mary Monastery asked if we would be interested in forming a Benedictine Oblate group in Macomb.

We began meeting with various Sisters visiting Macomb to help us discern our call to seek a deeper relationship with God by following the Rule of Benedict. We completed a two-year process of reading *The Rule* with a commentary by Sr. Joan Chittister led by Sisters Ruth Ksycki and Veronica Shunick.

In the Gospels, we often see Jesus being present at the table, sharing food for both body and soul. We read in *The Rule* that St. Benedict expects community members to be on-time for meals and prayer. Although the monks ate in silence, they were instructed to pay attention to what others at the table may need.

As our Oblate community developed, we began sharing meals together. The informal, often humorous, conversations around the table led to a deeper prayer as we shared Lectio. One Holy Thursday, we met at Newman Center so we could attend Holy Thursday Mass. Supper was light, but Lectio with the Holy Thursday readings was profound. One of the Oblates was drawn to Jesus' exchange with Peter who wanted more than just his feet washed. "*Peter, Peter, you don't get it,*" the Lord replied with weariness.



Macomb Oblate Gathering, 2021

That evening brought me poignant insight into the humanity of Jesus. For me, Holy Thursday has never been the same.

Our Macomb Oblate group reflects different backgrounds and insights which often lead to mind and heart expanding moments. As we weave our way along life's road, we represent diverse branches on the vine of Christ. Together we are seeking God while we challenge and support each other along the way.

Over the years, some members of the Macomb Oblate community moved away, while others joined. Being anchored with the Sisters of St. Mary Monastery, using Oblate study materials at meetings, and attending Oblate Day have helped us stay authentic to the Rule of Benedict. I recently moved from Macomb to care for my elderly father in his last years, and have felt a deep loss since I cannot meet with my Oblate community. When the COVID pandemic forced virtual Oblate meetings, I am now blessed to participate. God is with us through challenges, and difficult times also bring unexpected blessings.



Join Us for a Virtual Retreat!

The Benet House Retreat Center team is excited to present a wide array of virtual retreats, open for registration now, and accessible anywhere in the world. Below are our upcoming February, March and April retreats.

Weekly virtual retreats:

- **Lectio Divina:** Weekly on Tuesdays
- **Centering Prayer:** Weekly on Wednesday

Monthly virtual retreats:

- **Henri Nouwen Reading Group:** 1st Tuesday
- **Word Among Us:** 1st/3rd Mondays
- **Psalms:** 2nd Thursday
- **Thomas Merton Group:** 3rd Monday
- **Spirituality & Poetry:** 3rd Thursday
- **Wisdom Women:** 3rd Thursday

At Benet House:

- **Break-a-way Day:** 1st Wednesday

Featured Retreats:

- **Call of the Spirit: Sharing Compassion with the World:** Featuring Musician Karen Drucker
 - Date: Sunday, Feb. 20, 2022
 - Time: 2:00 – 3:30 PM (CT)
 - Virtual Retreat

- **Exploring the Language of Compassion:**

Featuring Author Marilyn McEntyre

- Date: Friday, March 4, 2022
Time: 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM
- Date: Saturday, March 5, 2022
Time: 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM
- Virtual Retreat

- **Discovering Boundless Compassion:** Sponsored by Benet House and held at The Grand Hall Sacred Heart Cathedral, Davenport, IA

- Dates: Wednesday, March 9, 16, 23, 30 and April 6, 13, 2022
- Time: 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM

- **Storytending: Cultivating a Life of Compassion for Self and Others:** Featuring author Diane Millis

- Date: Saturday, April 9, 2022
- Time: 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM
- Virtual and On-Site at Benet House Retreat Center

To view our full Virtual Retreat Listing, visit smmsisters.org/virtual-retreats or call (309) 283-2108 or email us at retreats@smmsisters.org.



Sr. Cecile Baer, OSB

Sr. Cecile (Muriel Maxine) Baer, OSB, 1928 - 2021

Sr. Cecile Baer, OSB, died Sunday, November 21, 2021 at the monastery. Born in Peoria, IL on March 12, 1928, she was the daughter of Cecil and Florence (Roach) Baer. Sr. Cecile entered the Benedictine community on October 23, 1946 and made her final profession on August 23, 1951.

She received her bachelor's degree from St. Ambrose College, Davenport, IA; a master's degree and Certificate for learning disability teaching from the University of Illinois, Champaign, IL; and a Certificate of Theology from St. Norbert College, De Pere, WI. A longtime teacher, her ministry included teaching at Ivesdale, Bradford, Clinton, IL, and Munster, IN. Sr. Cecile was a principal at St. Boniface South Side Catholic Grade School, Father Sweeney School, Peoria and Development Director at St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo, IL.

She was a founding member of SPEC (Special People Encounter Christ), Moline, IL and served as Assistant to the Treasurer and Director of Transportation for the St. Mary Monastery community. Sr. Cecile is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; her sister, Gloria Christian; her nieces and nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents; brothers, Edward and Mike; and a sister, Marianne Dempsey.



Sr. Catherine Patricia Ann Maloney, OSB

Sr. Catherine (Patricia Ann) Maloney, OSB, 1931 - 2021

Sr. Catherine Maloney, OSB, died Thursday, November 18, 2021 at the monastery. Born in Estherville, IA on May 11, 1931, she was the daughter of James Edward and Mildred Truesdell Maloney. Sr. Catherine entered the Benedictine community on August 15, 1949, and made her final profession on August 24, 1954.

She received her bachelor's degree from St. Ambrose College, Davenport, IA; a master's degree from University of Illinois, Champaign, IL; and a Certificate of Theology from St. Norbert College, De Pere, WI. Sr. Catherine taught in grade schools in IL at Atkinson, Clinton, Peoria, Monmouth, Wenona, Chicago and Alleman High School, Rock Island and St. Mary's Academy, Nauvoo. She also taught in Munster, IN.

She spent 25 years in Pastoral Care at Methodist Medical Center, Peoria, IL; Franciscan Medical Center, Rock Island, IL; Illinois Valley Community Hospital, LaSalle, IL; St. Augustine Manor, Peoria, IL and Hospice at Genesis Hospital in Davenport, IA. Sr. Catherine is survived by her Benedictine Sisters; her brother, Thomas Maloney; her sister, Mary Elizabeth Walsh; and nieces and nephews. Sister was preceded in death by her parents; her mother who raised her, Mary Mortensen Maloney; her twin Nancy Ann Gilhooly and her sister, Maureen Patricia Porter.

In Memoriam . . .

Alumnæ

Monica Crossman DeWith, '70, died September 17, 2021.

Patricia Cox Wynn, '64, died October 20, 2021.

Alice Gavin Enderlin, '55, died December 23, 2021.

Sharon Murray Lysaught, '63, (former Sister Maria) died December 31, 2021.

Patricia Harrison, '61, sister of Miriam Harrison, '59 died in December, 2021.

A correction from the Fall, 2021 issue: Marie Yehl, mother of SMA alums Julianne Yehl DeVos, '64 (*deceased in 1998*), Mary Ellen Yehl Taets, '65, Emily Yehl Landers, '68, and Grandmother of Jeannie Landers, '89, died April 14, 2021. She died on her 101st birthday.

Friends

Margaret Mary Dolan, mother of Cathy Dolan, '86, died November 8, 2021.

Marilyn Logsdon, mother of Carol Logsdon Watson, '72, died August 29, 2021.

Juan Oliver, companion of Audrey Koors, '59, died December 10, 2021.

Rosemary Owens, mother of Kathleen Owens Reuland, '67, died October 13, 2021, 4 days short of her 100th birthday.

Mary Anne Banks (formerly Sister Maurus), died January 22, 2022.

40th Class Reunion



Class of 1981 celebrates 40th anniversary at Benet House, December, 2021. Left to right: Donna Moore Conboy, Cindy Verkler Wade, Cecilia Saavedra, Melanie Stieren Chancellor, Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB and Jacquelyn Lacera





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Jan Gull, Editor



Upcoming Retreat:

Exploring the Language of Compassion:

Featuring Author Marilyn McEntyre

- **Friday, March 4 7:00 PM – 8:30 PM**
- **Saturday, March 5 10 AM – 11:30 AM**
- **Virtual Retreat**

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