



“All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ” (RB 53.1)



“Sunday Morning Show and Tell” is one of the best parts of Sunday brunch when the quilters are here. Toni Hagel, Sister Patti Koehler, Diane Marquart and our volunteer, Bel Campbell, enjoy the latest creations.

One of the most formative chapters of the Rule of Saint Benedict is chapter 53 on the reception of guests. It begins with the unequivocal “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Mt 25:35).” There is much to unpack in that sentence and we Benedictines have been mining that verse for centuries in order to live up to it. St. Benedict observes in this chapter that “monasteries are never without guests,” but when we intentionally choose this as a ministry of our community, we must rise to the occasion.

In our early days as a community we did not have many guests, much less many who stayed overnight. When we moved to Richardton in 1967 we built a monastery large enough to house the women students attending Assumption College at the Abbey and four guest rooms. Within three years, however, the college closed. After a short time we were approached to open our monastery to various groups for weekend retreats (Sacred Heart Retreats, Permanent Deacons, Marriage Encounter, etc.). Without being overly aware of what we were developing, we shifted into hospitality as one of our main ministries. We found out from our guests that we were, indeed, good at this, as well as offering a greatly needed and deeply appreciated service. It became our home ministry in “building the Kingdom of God” in our daily living. As our home community grows older and smaller, we have adapted in order to keep the ministry viable and able to help support us.

(Continued on page 2)

November 30 Begins the Year of Consecrated Life Throughout the World

The Year of Consecrated Life begins with the beginning of the Church year, the first Sunday of Advent. Bismarck Bishop David Kagan invited the religious leaders to join him in planning for the coming year. The two Benedictine prioresses, Sister Paula Larson of Sacred Heart Monastery and Sister Nancy Miller of Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck, as well as Abbot Brian Wangler of Assumption Abbey met with him to plan a state-wide event on April 25, 2015, to increase awareness and interest in the religious life. The venue will be the University of Mary in Bismarck and will feature panels of women and men religious and lay persons discussing the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.

More details of this event will be forthcoming in the *Dakota Catholic Action*, the diocesan websites (www.bismarckdiocese.com and www.fargodiocese.org) as well as our own Facebook page on our website.



St. Benedict's chapter on guests, one of his most detailed and challenging, took on greater significance in our lives. A warm welcome is just the beginning. We renovated and combined rooms to better accommodate our guests with a bath as well as accommodating the variety of groups who use various gathering rooms. We hold true to our lives as monastics but open ourselves to those who come. The "welcomed as Christ" is a dual challenge to us: on the one hand we are called to welcome the guest as Christ would do; on the other, we welcome the guest as if he or she were Christ himself.

We try to attune ourselves to the guests' needs and comfort when they come. St. Benedict instructs us this way: "All humility should be shown in addressing a guest on arrival or departure. By a bow of the head . . . Christ is to be adored because he is indeed welcomed in them." We invite them to prayer and Eucharist with us, and many join us for meals. It is important to us that our guests are comfortable here and feel at home. To give an idea of how this ministry has grown for us, we expect that by the end of this year (with the present reservations we have) that we will have housed 1076 guests for overnight and have welcomed 177 who come for day activities.

Because of this ministry we have chosen to upgrade our heating/cooling system in the main part of the monastery. It is also important to us that this new equipment is much more efficient and better for the environment both within and outside the building. We dedicated the proceeds from our Celebrate the West event this year toward funding this vast project and we are sending out a year-end letter asking our friends to consider a donation toward this project. In addition we will use whatever funds we raise online on Giving Hearts Day, February 12, 2015.



Sister Phoebe Schwartz serves as contact/coordinator for three Sisters of the Order of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate of Guadalupe in Mexico to the Bismarck Diocese. Sisters Azucena, Brenda and Rosa will be serving the Hispanic population as catechists in the Williston area, the heart of the North Dakota oil boom, on a five-year grant from the Catholic Extension Society.

You can join us in our hospitality ministry. You can help us by doing any or all of these three things: 1) pray for the success of the project and those who are working on it; 2) contribute to its funding; and 3) come visit us sometime as our guest and enjoy the completion! To schedule any overnight accommodations or group visits, please contact Sister Phoebe Schwartz at the Monastery.



During our last community days, Sister Lucille Heidt hosted a "Clean out the Cupboard" bingo night with many prizes. Sister Marie Hunkler and our volunteer, Sandra, have fun showing off their winnings. Sister Renée Branigan was the only one who did not win—all due to lack of practice she said.

Live-in Volunteers Join with Us in Service

This year we have been blessed with three marvelous live-in volunteers. Liz came from Wilmington, DE, in early June and was with us through September. We all commented on, and were humbled by, her big heart and ready spirit. She prayed, worked and grew among us, discovering skills she never knew she had. We were blessed to have her here.

It took a few tries to get Sandra here because of various interruptions in her life, but we certainly enjoyed her time with us. As a retired hospital chaplain from Billings, MT, she radically changed gears here, joining in the round of physical work that needs to be done to keep the monastery going. She hopes to come back early in the coming year.

Bel, a retired hospice chaplain, arrived in late October from Nashville, TN. It is not all that easy to tell her that when the polar vortex hit us we got off easy—we did as far as the amount of snow, but the radio informed us one day that it was colder in North Dakota than on the summit of Mt. Everest.

Our volunteers are asked to work at assigned tasks about 30 hours a week and are invited to basically live as we live. Most take the opportunity to learn new arts and crafts, expand their education, and relax.

We greatly appreciate them!

The Collection Basket

Perhaps you wonder every now and then, “Where is Sister ___?” We have the answer! Most of us live at the monastery: *Sister Paula Larson, prioress; Sister Laura Hecker, subprioress; Sisters Kathleen Kuntz, Dolores Heidt, Janeane Klein, Ruth Fox, Michael Emond, Renée Branigan, Phoebe Schwartz, Patti Koehler and Maryann Nowakowski.* *Sister Lucille Heidt* lives in New Town; *Sister Carol Axtmann* is at Subiaco Manor in Dickinson; *Sisters Anna Rose Ruhland and Jill West* live and work in Bismarck; and *Sister Marie Hunkler* ministers in Wahpeton.

Our fulltime “pray-ers” are *Sisters Monica Thome and Perpetua Steiner* at St. Benedict’s Health Center in Dickinson; *Sisters Brigid McLean, Joan Nuss and Mary William Stadick* are at Sandford St. Vincent’s Continuing Care Center in Bismarck; and *Sister Annella Gardner* in the Richardton Health Center.



We are happy to support Dickinson’s new Badlands Choice Clinic for those who face crisis pregnancies. Located in the former St. Patrick’s convent/parish office building, they have many needs in their startup and thanks to our upgrade to our heating/cooling system we are offering window air conditioners and handrails. Sisters Phoebe Schwartz and Patti Koehler as well as Ila Perhus, Assistant Foundation Director, attended their fundraising banquet on our behalf.



This year’s produce has been abundant in some areas, weaker in others and supplemented by the Abbey’s overabundance of certain items. Our potatoes came in beautifully; at 850 lbs. it is twice as many as last year. The swiss chard, zucchini, carrots, and rhubarb fared wonderfully in the plentiful rain of the summer too. The Abbey donated some (tons) of their extra pumpkins and parsnips as huge as baobab trees. Other folks donated corn and apples that are prepared and stored for future use. Great abundance generates a variety of recipes too—some thumbs up, some not. This picture captures Sisters Maryann and Kathleen on one of the “Apple Days.”



Sister Paula Larson, prioress, (center) enjoys and excels at the “outdoor” stuff that keeps a monastery in the country thriving with its gardens, pastures and out buildings. A great blessing for us, too, is her understanding of our monastery in keeping up with the necessary improvements and upgrades. On her way back from tending the llamas in the north barn, she stopped to have a progress chat with Ken Schwartz (left), chief engineer of the heating/cooling project, and Jason Dirk (right) of Dirk’s Plumbing & Heating whose crew is doing the installation. Molly’s self-assumed job is to follow Sister Paula wherever she goes.



At the American Benedictine Academy Convention last summer Sister Renée Branigan was surprised to receive the Academy’s third Egregia Award. This award is given at the convention for various reasons, including a longtime member in longtime service to the Academy. As a member of the ABA, Sister Renée has attended every biennial convention since 1980 and began her work as editor and managing editor for the *American Monastic Newsletter* (1982-2012) and for the *Convention Proceedings* (1990-2012). Father Terrence Kardong, a monk of Assumption Abbey and the first recipient of this award, made the presentation. He has been editor and Sister Renée editorial assistant for *The American Benedictine Review* since 1982.



We had the largest gathering of guests for All Souls day this year. Almost sixty of us shared the Eucharist and then brunch. Having the feast on a Sunday made it possible for so many to come and spend the morning with us at breakfast.

If any of you would like to come and join us for Eucharist we have a variety of Mass times: Sunday 9 a.m.; Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday at 7: 30 a.m.; Wednesday at 11:25 a.m.; and Saturday at 8:00 a.m. We would appreciate your giving us a call if you would like to join us any day for Mass.

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We are getting ready for our second Giving Hearts Day event on February 12, 2015. We have joined in a collaborative effort with eleven other non-profits in our area to raise funds online on this day. Last year we had only a few weeks to prepare, but this year we are much more proactive and a larger group from southwestern ND.

First, we would like you to know about **Impact GiveBack website** (<http://www.impactgiveback.org/>) which is a one-stop donation site, open all year, for the great variety of non-profits in the state of North Dakota. It is a safe and easy to navigate and to donate online. There is an alphabetical band at the top and you simply click on the letter of your charity of choice. For instance, A would lead you to a listing of places such as Assumption Abbey who is now on the site; you will find Sacred Heart Benedictine Foundation under S.

Second, we would like you to mark your calendars for this very special day. Giving Hearts Day is a special event on the site that happens one day a year and what makes it special is that there are matching funds on that day. Last year on February 13, 2014, the gifts for the day totaled \$5.7 million in 24,407 individual donations for 235 charities. The total includes the online donations, matching funds and incentive awards. It increased a phenomenal 49% in donations over the previous year!

We will send out more information later, but, for now, visit the website, start shopping for your charities, and prepare your "giving heart." Giving to any charity that serves others is a way to participate in the actual ministry the non-profit provides to those in need. It is a way to support those who do work in which you believe but are not able to do yourself.



Throughout Advent let us be more aware of those who have not heard "Welcome!" May we all welcome Jesus this Christmas in the stranger, the one in need, the one alone. May our welcome be as warm and true as Jesus would give.

Sister Patti Koehler designed our Christmas card again this year to carry our deepest prayers and warmest wishes for you!

You will all be held in prayer throughout our Christmas novena of Masses.