



## Sister Paula Larson Reelected and Blessed as Prioress



L to R: Sister Jeanne Ranek of Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, SD, facilitator for the election; Sister Paula Larson, prioress; and Sister Joella Kidwell of Monastery of the Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, IN, president of the Federation of St. Gertrude and presider at the election and blessing.

On May 2 we reelected Sister Paula Larson prioress. Because it was a reelection and our Federation of St. Gertrude President, Sister Joella Kidwell, was present and presiding, Sister Paula was blessed for her second term on the same day.

In the lives of Benedictines, the office of prioress/abbot is a pivotal role of service and responsibility. The Rule of St. Benedict has two chapters (RB 2 and 64) dedicated to the kind of person the prioress (abbot) ought to be and the community's responsibility in selecting her. Only the finally professed members present at the time of election vote, but in more recent years that is merely the culmination of almost a year's preparation. The long process of discernment preceding the actual voting is a communal time of prayer for openness to the Holy Spirit and working with a facilitator to envision the next four years'

focus and direction of our monastic growth together.

Sister Jeanne Ranek, of Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, SD, worked with us in mid-March to help us draft our directional statements for the next four years. The advantage of this is that we agree communally on what we discern needs

(Continued on page 2)

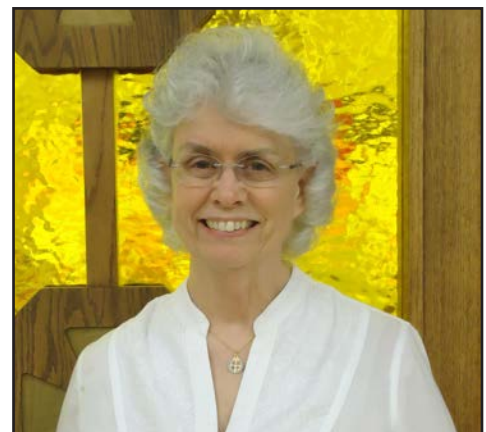
## *A Monastic Vocation Rejoices in Golden Jubilee*

As editor of this newsletter, I choose to write of my golden jubilee of monastic profession from my own perspective. It is an honor to celebrate this milestone with Vespers and a lovely dinner with my monastic community and friends at the end of our retreat on June 13.

In this Year of the Consecrated Life (YCL) I would like to tell you how my religious vocation evolved. There is no one way for this to happen because each person is an individual and God relates to each of us in a special way. With me, I just "knew" since about the 4th or 5th grade. My parents were good Catholics and each had a personal relationship with God, so they formed a family that cultivated both of these values.

My father served in the Air Force and we moved around a lot. As my parents valued Catholic education (oftentimes at great expense and inconvenience), I was exposed to a variety of religious Sisters who were influential in my formative years in grade and high school. As a freshman in high school I entered the Sisters Adorers of the Precious Blood in Wichita, KS, as an aspirant for two years before being misdiagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and asked not to return. While it was a big blow to my dreams, it was quite obviously God's way of getting me to where I really belonged. While I was in Wichita my family was transferred from Guam to Minot AFB. In my junior year I attended our Sacred Heart Academy in Minot, and joined the convent as a senior.

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Sister Renée Branigan, OSB

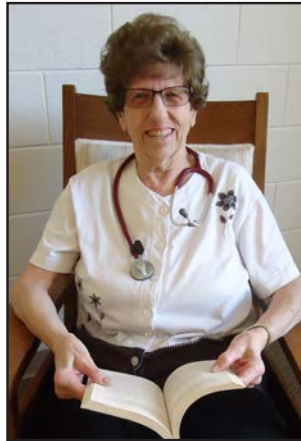
## **Sister Michael Emond “Retires”**

Sister Michael Emond is retiring as a PA (Physician’s Assistant) at the Richardton Clinic the end of May. Most of her 36 years as a PA were spent here in southwestern North Dakota at Hettinger for 25 years and in Richardton for her last 7. “Sister Mike” has a huge recognition factor in this area and for all the right reasons.

Her first training was as a nurse, but one hospital administrator knew she could be so much more and informed her of a Kellogg grant opportunity. She was accepted into the PA program, excelled and began serving with wisdom and compassion.

The Richardton Clinic will host her retirement celebration 2:00-4:30 p.m., Friday, May 29.

A Sister’s *retirement* plays with the truth a bit. Sister Michael has great energy and an abiding posture of “help where I can” and “do what needs to be done.” She also has talents in a variety of areas. So, basically retirement for her means she will have more time and energy to enjoy canning; making jelly, fruitcakes, and Molly’s dog biscuits; planting and tending her flower plots; etc. She will definitely be able to pick her own books off the bookmobile (vs. someone else who fills her bag) and reading more.



## **Sister Paula . . .** (Continued from page 1)

greater focus and emphasis and then articulate short statements that will serve as our guides. This year we agreed on the following two statements: 1) *We commit to nurture our lived monastic spirituality by reflecting on our present monastic practices and come to a deeper mutual understanding of monastic life.* 2) *We commit to extend ourselves in charitable works, individually and corporately.*

Sister Jeanne also facilitated the final discernment prior to the actual canonical voting. Various candidates for prioress emerged and each was invited to make a statement prior to a conversational question-answer period. After Sister Jeanne reported on a preliminary vote by the community she asked us if we were ready to proceed to the canonical election. We were.

Sister Joella presided at the election assisted by the previously elected officials: Sister Renée Branigan, secretary; Sister Jill West, first teller; and Sister Lucille Heidt, second teller.

When Sister Paula begins her new term this June 3, she will begin her seventeenth year serving as our prioress. She was first elected in 1989 and served three terms until

2001; she was elected for another first term in 2011. In her years of service we have made great strides in renovating our monastery to better meet our needs and those of our guests as well as becoming much “greener” and reducing our carbon footprint. But even more importantly to us as Benedictines, we have grown closer and more loving as a community and continue to find joy in building the kingdom of God on earth.

## **Monastic Vocation . . .** (Continued from page 1)

A few weeks after graduation from high school I became a novice and began to understand why God wanted me to be a Benedictine monastic: I found I had a monastic heart and the Rule of Benedict fit well as my guide for life. Daily life in community centered around Divine Office several times a day was, and still is, rich ground for my seeking God and growing in my vows of stability, fidelity to the monastic way of life and obedience. Living in so many places (I loved that, too) was a unique beginning to my great appreciation for stability. Our community moved from Minot to Richardton in 1967 while I was still in formation and soon I knew I was “home” for the rest of my life. Though born in Georgia (always another home place in me), I am now deeply formed by my life on the North Dakota prairie.

Having known religious women mostly as my teachers, I was drawn to teaching. I cherish my early years in teaching in grade and high school, as well as my many years on the university level and in spiritual formation. I thrive on learning and there is no better way to keep learning and becoming than to teach. In addition to communication and English education, I have also been allowed to cultivate my interest in journalism, editing a variety of newsletters and publications, as well as my years as editorial assistant of *The American Benedictine Review*, a scholarly journal. After receiving my second MA in Christian Spirituality, I deeply enjoy furthering my study and teaching in that field as well.

My present responsibilities have me using all my education and for that I am most grateful. In a smaller community, we usually have a list of responsibilities rather than a single job. For me, a single job would be burdensome but multiples give me more energy with the variety. Presently I serve as the director of the Sacred Heart Benedictine Foundation, Vocations and our Volunteer Program; editorial assistant for *The American Benedictine Review*; editor of our *The Benedictine Witness* and *Promise of the Prairie*; a member of our Formation Team and an instructor in our joint formation program with Assumption Abbey; and librarian.

My life is such that I rise early with joy for the new day and, when it is time to retire at night, I go to rest thanking God for another grace-filled day. God continually sends blessings and I find new ones every day.





Sacred Heart Monastery Employees who are new or changing their work are (l. to r.) Ross Myran, Mona Dressler, Pat Wilson



### Employees: Our Extended Community

We have had some new additions and a major change to our staff since the last issue. In a community of our size, employees are like extended community members whom we greatly value.

Ross Myran of nearby Taylor came on board as a second maintenance man in early December 2014. He spent much of his early months following his mentor, our longtime maintenance man Frank Buresh, around to learn the building and the outside to get a sense of the whole campus. We had been able to get by for a few years with summer hires for the outside work, but with the energy changeover and the backlog of long-term maintenance, we welcomed Ross on board.

Our long-term business manager, computer guru, and ETC. in capitals, Pat Wilson has decided it is time retire. She and her husband Bob are moving to Illinois to be closer to family. What looked like a doomsday scenario has been converted into a win-win situation.

Mona (Ramona) Dressler, a local rancher north of us, began working in our business office in early March. Though experienced in business, she had to learn our accounting system. Pat is an excellent teacher and Mona is a quick learner. The healthcare component alone would intimidate most, but things are transitioning well.

The win-win comes in contracting with Pat to continue to do our website, Facebook page and most of our computer troubleshooting from her new home. Through a special program available from Consolidated in Dickinson, she will be able to remotely access our computers and manage them. She will also return several times a year for some onsite work. Because she is gifted in so many areas her workload expanded as we came to rely on her beyond her job description. With this arrangement, her load is lighter and we can be assured that life is not halted by a cranky computer.

### Volunteers: Our Invited Community

Over the years we have been blessed with many women volunteers and each has brought unique gifts and insights. Presently Jennifer Allen from Orrington, Maine, is with us for a couple of months and she brings much wisdom and discipline for one so young. She graduated from high school last year and worked at a number of jobs, all the while knowing that she wanted to pursue art. She has such talent that she has been accepted at the Massachusetts College of Art & Design and she uses her free time here to compile her portfolio.

She found us on the internet and was encouraged by a priest friend of hers because after graduation from high school he spent several months at Blue Cloud Abbey to get his bearings for life. An abbey or a monastery is an excellent place in which to take a long view of life. Jennifer enjoys exploring the countryside (she is into landscapes and freely praises what western North Dakota has to offer), learning new skills, and participating in life as we live it here. She is a quick learner, an easy conversationalist, and shares well in our humor.



Jennifer came as a gifted artist and cake baker/designer, but she has been attracted to beading and trying to learn to play the piano and violin on her own.

## SEPTEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

Please plan to join us for our  
20th Celebrate the West event "Reflections"  
at the Elks in Dickinson on Saturday, September 26.

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## The Collection Basket

On Sunday, May 10, Pat Herbl of Bismarck made her final oblation as an Oblate of this community. Sister Paula Larson, prioress, accepted her commitment on behalf of the community. Afterward we had a reception for her in the dining room. The heat had been turned off for the installation of the HVAC units and, of course, the temperatures dropped as if on cue. Sister Ruth Fox, former Oblate director, observed rather wryly to Pat, "Too bad we couldn't give you a warm reception!"

Our Oblates gathered to attend the annual Oblate retreat at the Abbey which featured several talks given at the Year of Consecrated Life gathering. Sister Renée Branigan presented her talk on Obedience to the Oblates and an engaging question/answer period followed.



On April 25 there was a mass migration of Benedictines from the Abbey and our monastery heading to the Convocation in Celebration of the Year of Consecrated Life (YCL) at the University of Mary in Bismarck. Besides the two keynote speakers, Sister Anna Laura Karp, O.P. from Nashville, TN, and Father Roger Landry of the Diocese of Fall River, MA, the breakout panels consisted of Benedictines, Oblates and laity. To increase understanding of the consecrated (religious) life, the panels consisted on religious vows (chastity and relationships, obedience and authority, and poverty and property) and hallmarks (stewardship and social justice, work and prayer, vocations).



For those of you who need some help understanding our big energy changeover which is almost ready, HVAC stands for "Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning." It began last fall with Dirk's Plumbing and Heating from Mandan and Berger Electric from Dickinson preparing the infrastructure for the external units. They dismantled the coal furnace and sent it to its new home, emptied and sold the propane tank, and readied the natural gas lines.

Interiorly they began all the duct work and piping and whatever, and stored the HVAC units until we could turn off the heat to begin the last phase.

Early May came after a warm April so the final stage was set. The units have been taken out of storage and installed in a few weeks and these next few weeks will be ETS (Energy Tech Systems of Bismarck) replacing thermostats and connecting them to each unit. There is a real choreography in the sequence of this whole affair and Ken Schwartz of ONE Building Systems Consultants (Bismarck), project manager, keeps it all flowing.

We are quite familiar with turning off the boiler at a certain point in spring right before we get a surprise, lingering cold front that can leave us with chattering teeth. We are still quite chilly now (cold, actually), but this is the last time we will have to do this. When summer shows for real, we will have air conditioning on tap; when winter follows, we will just tap heat. That's progress!

The proceeds from this year's Giving Hearts Day helped immensely. May God bless all you who responded!



One of the great advantages of our new HVAC system is that we no longer need the window air conditioning units we have used in some of our guest rooms. But even better than not having to seasonally install/uninstall them, we found a wonderful future for them at the new Badlands Choice Clinic housed in the former convent building next to St. Patrick's Church in Dickinson.

Volunteers and donors from all walks of life are coming together to prepare for and provide needed services for women with crisis pregnancies. Its mission statement reads, in part, that the clinic seeks "to empower women and families to make life-affirming pregnancy decisions through counseling, education, compassion and aid through the gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ." The board of directors has modeled the clinic on the First Choice Clinic in Bismarck and is an affiliate of Heartbeat International. Their website address is [www.badlandschoiceclinic.com](http://www.badlandschoiceclinic.com).