



The Lord Welcomes His Good and Faithful Servant Sister Brigid

When Sister Brigid McLean died on December 20, 2016, she had spent eighty of her ninety-eight years as a Benedictine of Sacred Heart Monastery. She was a member of the famous “class of six,” each of whom figured very significantly in sustaining our community with their gifts and dedication.

Sister Brigid was born in Plentywood, MT, the fourth of twelve children born to John and Martha McLean. In high school she felt the stirring of a religious vocation, so she contacted her two aunts and a cousin who were members of Sacred Heart Convent, located at the time in Garrison. While welcoming a class of six entrants would be a boon for any religious community, 1936 was a crucial time for this community. The bank failures of the depression wiped out all the savings for a proper motherhouse for the rapidly growing group of Benedictines and its poverty led the bishop to encourage the Sisters to join with St. Benedict’s Convent at St. Joseph, MN. The Sisters’ sacrifice for independence paid off in the end.

In her many years in community, Sister Brigid taught in grade and high schools in North Dakota, Montana and at our academy in Bogotá, Colombia. She served the community for many years as formation director, subprioress and treasurer/bookkeeper. In her later years she served as bookkeeper at St. Vincent’s Care Center in Bismarck and Trinity High School in Dickinson. Upon her return to the monastery, she ably served the needs of the monastic community until she was no longer able. Her last years were spent at St. Vincent’s where she died.

Few people were as adept as she in sorting what we needed to keep from clutter that should find another home! This particular gift helped her clean out, sort, pack and load the contents of our three-story convent/academy building in Minot, only to come to our new location here in Richardton to unload, sort and place what went where. We did not use moving vans with a crew, but all the trucks and help we could secure from friends, especially the Abbey monks.

Despite her many gifts, Sister Brigid is most remembered for who she was, not just what she could do. She was a true Benedictine: a woman of prayer and good example. Sister Brigid is survived by her brothers Leonard (Barbara) and Robert McLean, her sisters Teresa McGrath, Agnes Hamman and Vivian Messbarger; numerous nieces and nephews; and her monastic community of Sacred Heart Monastery in Richardton, including her cousin Sister Jill West and her surviving monastic classmates, Sisters Monica Thome and Annella Gardner.



Sister Brigid McLean, OSB



Sister Marie Hunkler, OSB

Sister Marie Hunkler Celebrates Golden Jubilee July 14

The monastic community, family and friends of Sister Marie Hunkler gathered at Vespers to rejoice with her on her golden jubilee of monastic profession and witness her recommitment. In the presence of Sister Paula Larson, prioress, Sister Marie renewed her vows of stability, obedience and fidelity to the monastic way of life (this vow includes poverty and celibacy).

Sister Marie is the daughter of the late Deacon Howard and Hertha Hunkler. As the fourth of ten children raised on a farm-ranch near Napoleon, she grew up in a household of faith that prepared her well for life as a Benedictine. Her brother, Fr. Jerome, serves in the Fargo diocese in Steele, Tappen and Medina. Though her siblings live in various parts of the US, she cherishes her family relationships and keeps up with them all, including the subsequent generations.

(Continued on page 2)

Member Monasteries Meet For St. Gertrude Federation

In June Sister Paula Larson, prioress, and Sisters Phoebe Schwartz and Patti Koehler, delegates, represented us at the General Chapter of the Federation of St. Gertrude in Yankton, SD. The Chapter's theme, "Paschal Mystery Journey to Transformation," incorporated the spiritual and practical aspects of this triennial gathering of the member monasteries. The purpose of the gathering is the presentation and discussion of current material that is informative, inspirational and interactive.

Membership in a Federation serves as a support for the independent monasteries as well as offering an affiliation that broadens the perspective of living the Benedictine life. We are a founding member of this Federation in 1937 and it served as opportunity to maintain our independence in a time of great poverty. Such a grouping of independent monasteries offers mutual support, common endeavors, and increasing awareness and understanding in rapidly changing times.

At a Chapter there is often a review of our common guiding document Listen and its adjunct documents, an election of Federation Council members, and a review of financial statements as well as presentations on trending contemporary topics. This year a new Federation president was elected for a six-year term. This position includes handling both the business of the Federation but, perhaps more importantly, providing spiritual wisdom and assistance.

Every five years a member community has a visitation, a technical term for a "health" checkup. The president and another visitor chosen by the Sisters will visit a community, meet with groups as well as individuals, review the financial statements and board/council minutes, etc. and make recommendations from what they have heard and seen. The community then has a year to implement and report on the progress of the recommendations. We have ours scheduled this July, so we invited the new president to come with the outgoing president so she can get some on-the-job training.

Sister Marie Celebrates Jubilee . . .

After entering Sacred Heart Convent in Minot in September 1961, she pronounced her first vows June 23, 1966. Sister Marie's ministries through the years fall into four fields: education, parish work, leadership as prioress, and pastoral care. As a teacher she served at St. Nicholas in Garrison and St. Leo's and Bishop Ryan in Minot. Her parish ministry included Foxholm, Berthold, Our Lady of Grace and St. Leo's in Minot, and Queen of Peace in Dickinson.



Sister Patti Koehler, Sister Paula Larson, prioress, and Sister Phoebe Schwartz represented us at the 26th Chapter of the Federation of St. Gertrude in late June.

In 2001 Sister Marie was elected the eighth prioress of Sacred Heart Monastery and served until 2005. Her pastoral care ministry began at St. Vincent's Nursing Home in Bismarck, continued at a residency program for chaplains at Park Ridge, IL, before going to St. Luke's Midland Regional Medical Center in Aberdeen, SD, and then St. Benedict's Health Center in Dickinson. In 2006 she began her service as Chaplain and Spiritual Care Services Coordinator at the Benedictine Living Community in Wahpeton. She is currently serving her third term as President of the North Dakota Chaplains' Association. In addition to her many years of various ministries, she has also served on various boards and committees in her monastic community, the diocese of Bismarck and in various capacities in the National Association of Catholic Chaplains. She is an accomplished organist and has always offered her time and skill to help out wherever she has been stationed.

Sister Marie is fully intentional in whatever she does. She is attentive to prayer and liturgy, living simply and in good physical and mental health, taking daily walks and biking when weather permits, volunteering in various capacities in her local area, donating blood, and just plain helping others have a good day.

The Collection Basket

We have long been a sponsor and have had members in the American Benedictine Academy pretty much since it began. In the 1980s Sister Ruth Fox was the president and Sister Renée Branigan served as a board member and began her long tenure with the *The American Monastic Newsletter*. Sister Renée no longer works with the *AMN*, but she is again serving on the board.

The American Benedictine Academy meets next summer at St. Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, MN. The theme of the biennial convention is "Artisans of the Monastery" and, with St. John's Abbey nearby, it is a perfect location for this theme. Artists of a great variety of media are cherished in a Benedictine community.

The convention is open to non-members of the ABA. If you have questions or want further information, you can write to Sister Renée at the monastery or email her at reneeosb@ndsupernet.com.



St. Benedict says in the opening of chapter 53 of his Rule, “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ. . . .” We try to live up to that admonition with every guest who comes to our door. However, we admit to sheer delight when youngsters come. We recently hosted a large group of home-schooled students who came to see the llamas because they were studying them. We tried to find our llama cookie cutters for their treat, but we had to go with doggie bones. With kids, however, cookies are cookies!



North Dakota has a strong sense of community identity and, perhaps, that is why Benedictine communities feel at home here. We joined the North Dakota Community Foundation about a year ago and are happy that we did. This is a win for the donor as well as a win for us as a community. Over 600 charitable funds participate in a foundation formed with the intent of “North Dakotans helping North Dakotans.”



After our north turbine was down for a few months, the parts arrived and the workers showed up to get them both working well. It was just in time, too, because the wind has been blowing overtime. We have, unfortunately, used up all the spare parts we had on hand. This year marks 20 years of good service and great savings from these first commercial wind turbines in North Dakota. If you know anyone who can clone additional parts or has a spare turbine that is not being used, we would be interested!



The annual community retreat is characteristic of almost every Benedictine community. Our community has chosen to have both men and women as directors, usually Benedictine women or a monk-priest. It has worked well for us.

This summer we had Father Michael Peterson, a former monk of the now-closed Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota and a present member of St. John’s Abbey in Collegeville, MN. We greatly appreciated his retreat, not only for its excellent, original content and direct delivery, but also for his opening by playing a brief piece on one of his four flutes.

When he finished the retreat with us, he spent a few days at Assumption Abbey visiting the “Blue Cloud Boys,” a.k.a. Brothers Benet Tvedten, James Hanson and Charles McDaniels.



Any reader of this newsletter knows how much we like and appreciate our brother monks at Assumption Abbey. We have worked with them since our beginning on the reservation in Elbowoods in 1910, but since our move to Richardton in 1967 we have had the opportunity to come to know their whole community.

We share their sorrow in the loss of Abbot Brian Wangler. Abbot Brian had been the well-loved pastor of the local and some smaller surrounding parishes for many years prior his election as the eighth abbot of Assumption Abbey in 2004. We appreciated that, as the abbot, he was in our weekly chaplain rotation here at the monastery and we enjoyed his company. He was a good, wise, pleasant friend whom we now miss, but we can celebrate that he is now enjoying life everlasting.

A Religious Vocation One of God’s Best Blessings

Though fewer people are responding to religious vocations, there are complex reasons. There is no reason to conclude that people are just too selfish and self-serving or that religious vocations are calls of the past but not of the present. Nor can we simply dismiss the decline as attributable to the fact of many more opportunities to serve in the church than in the past without becoming a religious. One truth that can be proven is that throughout church history religious vocations have waxed and waned. The early part of the 20th century was one of burgeoning vocations way out of proportion to other periods of history and that has distorted our expectations and our understanding of the present situation.

Yes, religious communities are smaller and older, but this is also a period of new communities appearing. One fact to consider, however, is that a religious vocation is a specific call of a specific person to a specific religious community. It is always God’s call in each of these aspects. Just as you may be called to marriage does not mean any spouse will do.

What makes this “specific call of a specific person to a specific religious community” difficult for us, however, is that we are not as active in the apostolate as we once were. Furthermore, as we are a relatively small monastic

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community in a lightly populated area, we do not have great exposure. As monastics, our lives center on praying the Divine Office and living in common, developing lives of personal prayer and fidelity to the Gospel, and using our talents, abilities and energy in work that contributes to the common good.

We have an online presence on our website (www.sacredheartmonastery.com), our Facebook page, and on the Federation of St. Gertrude (www.federationofstgertrude.org). We are listed in various vocation guides and we participate in our diocesan Thirst Conference as well as such events as the Vocation Jamboree at the University of Mary in Bismarck at which we were represented by Sister Phoebe Schwartze.

We have parish groups who like to bring their CCD groups to our monastery and the Abbey and Brother Michael Taffe from the Abbey and Sister Renée Branigan went to Billings Central Catholic High School in Montana to speak to some of the best high school students we have ever encountered. As a community we are sponsors of the Youth in Theology and Ministry, a fantastic summer program for high school students who have shown an interest in serving the Church in some capacity, including as priests and religious.

The point is that we are doing what we can do to make our way of life known to those who may have a religious vocation, especially if they may be called to our monastic community. But, hopefully, you readers may know of some women who may be called to religious life whom you can encourage and will tell them of our presence.

We would be so grateful for your prayers and your help in making us better known. All the information you need is on the mailing portion of this newsletter. If you want someone to reach out to the person you have in mind, you can contact Sister Renée here at the monastery and she will reach out to her. When one hears God's call and responds, there can be no greater joy in this life.

Please join us for a celebration

**Saturday Evening
September 23, 2017**

4:30-5:00 Social Gathering

5:00-6:00 Light Supper

6:00-6:30 Welcome & Entertainment

6:30-8:00 Tours & Visiting

RSVP by September 15

701-974-2121 or

shbf@sacredheartmonastery.com

