



Sister Michael Emond Celebrates 60th Jubilee of Monastic Profession



Sister Kathleen Kuntz congratulates Sister Michael Emond during the celebration of her 60th jubilee of monastic profession. Sister Michael is in a motorized cart after having hip surgery. She is faithful to her therapy, however, and will be back on her feet soon.

Sister Michael officially retired from public healthcare in 2016, but that hardly means she quit working. She is a great asset at the monastery. For her, “retirement” means she can spend time doing loads of guest laundry, canning and jelly making, making the best caramel popcorn ever, covering phone duty, etc.—that is, she helps wherever she is needed. She relaxes by finding more time for private prayer and reading, but, in whatever she does, she has the heart of a Benedictine.

Sister Michael Emond celebrated her 60th jubilee of monastic profession at Vespers on October 14. Her more than 60 years as a religious allows for a variety of “careers” of ministry as well as service to communal life.

She was born three months prematurely on a remote cattle ranch 40 miles south of Malta, MT, so her life did not look so promising. However, she has come a long way from her shoebox crib, warmer-oven incubator, and eye-dropper bottle. Early on she learned ranch chores, cooking and baking, as well as caring for her younger siblings. The one-room school was a three-mile round trip walk, but her love for learning was so well cultivated that she completed eight grades in seven years.

When she was eleven, her parents decided to send her to Sacred Heart Academy in Minot. As a boarder she worked with Sister Louise Wirtz in the garden and on the farm to earn her room and board. She felt so at home, she entered the Benedictine community at sixteen.

After making her first monastic profession in 1957, she taught grades first through fourth in Fallon before shifting into the medical field. In 1963 she became a registered nurse, in 1972 a nurse anesthetist and in 1979, after receiving a Kellogg grant to cover her education expenses, she became a physician assistant. She served in that capacity in Hawthorne, NV, as well as in Crosby, Hettinger and Richardton. In 2000 she was awarded the Friend of Medicine award from the North Dakota Medical Association for being such an effective advocate in healthcare, patient services and medicine.

Sister Patti Koehler Wins Art Award

Sister Patti is a most talented artist in a variety of media and she loves trying new things. For the Bismarck Art & Galleries Association’s Annual Fall Art Show this year, she submitted one of her brilliant textured mixed media paintings (top) and a resin picture, a medium she tried for the first time for the art show.

It is for her new attempt that she received a certificate recognizing that the picture would be on display at the Elsa Forde Gallery at Bismarck State College. This work, entitled “Embrace,” sold at the art show in October. Her mixed media paintings continue to sell in our gift shop and she will probably be adding some resin ones too. Knowing her, she will try yet another medium by the next newsletter!



Sister Paula Larson: Serving on Sanford Board of Directors West

In our monastic tradition, and particularly in our community, we have been active participants in healthcare delivery both in a rural hospital in Crosby, ND, and in a long term care center in Bismarck. For many years, it has been a blessing for me to participate in healthcare at a level above direct delivery. I have served on many healthcare boards and state boards.

The one that still has my full attention is my service to the Sanford Board of Directors. I began service in 2005 when the institution was MedCenter One. That means, I have gone through the merger process and now I serve a much larger system, one that provides service to much of western North Dakota where we live.

I am not shy to say that I do advocate for more services in our Dickinson region, not just for us, but for everyone, so that all have access to quality care. Sometimes my fellow board members kid me with the question, “How are things out in Dickinson?”

As a Benedictine, I believe in respect, dignity and healthcare for everyone, so it is an honor and privilege to participate in planning and decisions that affect the delivery of healthcare here in North Dakota. I enjoy my participation, because for me it is part of fulfilling my obligation to address the corporate works of mercy.



Blessed are those who give; more will be given to them. I have learned so much over the years about health care issues and concerns of the everyday person. May I continue to give so that life for others will be enriched; I will be enriched in return.

Grant Enabled Women to Enhance Formation with Online Engagement

“Wisdom Connections: Timeless Tradition Technological Times” does not exactly roll off one’s tongue or clearly reveal what it is all about. To those closely involved, the full title has been shortened to “T4.” Even more Benedictines are going to know and appreciate this program.

With a grant from the GHD Foundation, Benedictine communities of women came together to plan, form, prepare and launch a program that would allow women in monastic formation to view a collection of videos by well-known Benedictines with expertise in a variety of fields. The grant covered equipment, travel, and personnel to record the videos and build a library for online viewing and specifically

for Benedictine women. Those in formation joined in small groups with those from other communities and a perpetually professed facilitator assigned from yet another community to lead the discussions.

As you can tell from the group picture attached to this article, the members came from different states. This had an important advantage: it gives those in formation an opportunity get to know others in their same stage of formation, women they might never get to know. With fewer women joining monasteries today, they would not only have fellow Sisters in the same stage of formation, they would also have the opportunity of support in the future as



(Continued on page 3)

Back row: Sister Peggy Venteicher, Yankton, SD; Sister Tammy Shoemaker, St. Joseph, MN; Sister Rachel Geracitano, Ferdinand, IN; Front row: Sister Julia Abdala, Bristow, VA; Sister Michelle Renee St. Marie, Cullman, AL; and Sister Renée Branigan, facilitator for the group.

communities become smaller. Not only did the monthly online groups discuss the video they all viewed, but it also offered an opportunity to discuss other aspects of their progression in monastic formation.

While the grant was specifically for Benedictine women in formation, at the large gathering of participants at St. Leo's University in Florida this summer, ideas emerged for how this program might continue despite the end of grant funding. The coordinating team of T4 decided to open participation to women's and men's Benedictine communities for both initial and ongoing formation of monastics. For an annual fee of \$500, each participating community will have its own particular access code and can view, individually or communally, any presentation from the T4 library. The funds collected from membership will also allow for expanding the video library.

This is a great opportunity for any Benedictine community to have access to some of our best speakers and teachers without having to leave home or be restricted to a specific schedule.

The Collection Basket

Sister Phoebe Schwartz presented three talks at the Abbey Oblate retreat this fall and our Oblates were invited as well. In her topic "Living Our Call to Holiness with Our Benedictine Saints," she focused on St. Henry and St. Frances of Rome as well as our foremothers and forefathers who evangelized in Europe, Canada and the United States. The challenge for us today is to follow their example in our lives.



Our Thanksgiving was quiet and relaxing. Our prioress Sister Paula continued her tradition of preparing our Thanksgiving dinner. Fran Hauck, our baker and part-time cook, made the pumpkin pie the day before and Sister Carol Axtmann brought the cranberry relish, but Sister Paula prepared the rest.

Fr. Jerome Hunkler, brother of Sister Marie, was here for a few days of quiet and we welcomed him for Thanksgiving. Fr. Charlie Heidt, brother of Sisters Dolores and Lucille, came the day before and the three went to have Thanksgiving dinner with their family.



This year we decided to do something different this Christmas. Our tradition has been to draw names within our community and get a gift for our Sister. Of course, our gifts have been most practical (for instance, we have done wonders for Puffs bottom line!). This year, however, with the massive hurricane destruction, we chose to forego our internal gift exchange and donate to our Benedictine Sisters at Convento Santa Escolastica in Humacao, Puerto Rico.



Abbot Daniel Maloney and Sister Paula enjoyed a good laugh after Abbot Daniel's blessing as ninth abbot of Assumption Abbey July 27. Our two communities are close more than just geographically (maybe a mile as the crow flies), but our history goes back to our beginnings in 1910. We wish him well and offer our prayers for him and the monks.



For those of you who like Assumption Abbey wine (and who does not?) for gifts, we have the perfect "Topper" for it! One of our friends came to us a few months ago and asked us to make these, so Sisters Ruth Fox and Renée Branigan went into serious production. Sister Patti Koehler crocheted the cinctures out of llama wool to add our special touch. These felt creations are now in our gift shop and sell for \$10 each.



It is obvious that Sister Lucille Heidt has a green thumb. She has been cultivating last year's poinsettias for this year's Christmas and they are thriving!

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Receiving Well Is the First Step in Learning How to Give Freely

In the movie “Mary of Nazareth” the Christmas story is exceptionally well told. The shepherds, with their wives and children, come to the manger while Joseph, Mary and the Babe are sleeping. One shepherd, in a voice resonant with joy and peace, tells of the angel’s announcement that a Savior had been born, and they were to follow the light and seek the Babe.


The shepherd opens his arms to receive the Babe, asking, “May I?” Mary smiles and places the Infant in the arms of the shepherd. That is just the beginning. Jesus is passed from one shepherd to another to kiss and embrace. The Babe smiled and cooed throughout the whole the human relay.

What is so theologically sound and spiritually true is the *receiving* that happens in this scene. There is a great difference between getting and receiving. In getting we have the sense of accumulating, of transfer from one to another; there is no real aura of open acceptance or appreciation. Receiving, on the other hand, is much deeper and more complex. It implies humility, openness, acknowledgement, a willingness to embrace the gift and be changed by it.

The beginning of learning how to give with an open heart is learning how to receive with one. So much of Christmas giving, unfortunately, is really an anticipated exchange—gauging a balance between what I think I will get with what I will give. Receiving well is far more difficult than giving. Gracious acceptance is an art that we need to cultivate with practice.

The shepherds had it right. We need to reach out and ask the Messiah to come to us. We need to let go of our self-sufficiency and accept that we are receiving salvation.

Who knew the scruffy shepherds were the first of the wise men at the stable? They asked. They truly and intimately received. They passed on the joy they could not contain.



I will light candles this Christmas.
Candles of joy, despite all sadness,
Candles of hope where despair keeps watch.
Candles of courage where fear is ever present,
Candles of peace for tempest-tossed days,
Candles of grace to ease heavy burdens.
Candles of love to inspire all my living,
Candles that will burn all the year long.

*(Howard Thurman,
The Mood of Christmas
& Other Celebrations)*

*May your Christmas be alight with joy!
We remember you especially in our
Christmas novena and we send you our
personal prayers and Christmas greetings.*

Sister Paula, prioress, Sister Laura, Sister Monica,
Sister Kathleen, Sister Mary William, Sister Dolores, Sister Janeane,
Sister Lucille, Sister Ruth, Sister Carol, Sister Michael, Sister Anna Rose,
Sister Renée, Sister Marie, Sister Jill, Sister Phoebe, and Sister Patti