

# HORIZONS

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Simply Benedictine

## Message from the Prioress



Sister Kimberly Prohaska, Prioress

The year 2020 is a care package, unlike any we have ever known. First, I want to wish you a Merry Christmas! Greeting another with a Happy Christmas is a thought that we need to express and to hear this year. What a year it has been! All too often, we see many memes about 2020. It is a year we cannot forget but do not want to repeat. Covid and other invading parts of the pandemic have impacted the lives of the world in ways we never thought possible. We all have had to live with flux, uncertainty, and loss. Our hearts feel the definite loss of life and livelihood that cannot be recovered; much of it we do not want to relive. Since the pandemic's arrival, we have been praying. We have been glad for the moments of hope we have seen and experienced in one another. We have seen both extraordinary generosity and seeds of selfishness in the world; both are a part of our human condition. It is part of the human essence that God sees fit to remind us that we are not a power unto ourselves. God brings light when we see darkness in our lives and starlight in the moments of dusk. In times such as these, we recognize that we need others, and others need us. If the pandemic teaches us nothing else, it shows us that we live our lives beyond the confines of our limits and that nothing confines the human heart's ability. We can take comfort in that.

From Ordinary Time to the Advent, Christmas, and Lenten seasons, we rediscover that God never leaves us to ourselves, even when we do not want to be in the seasons we are experiencing. We

experience the mundane, complicated, apathetic, dull, useless, soundless, and challenging seasons of life. Yet, there are also moments filled with gratitude in our lives. Think of the birth of children, the celebrations of weddings and anniversaries, and goals have been attained, such as entrance into college, graduations, new jobs, relocation to a new home, and even retirement. There are other joys, too, watching a baby's baptism, later taking first steps, witnessing someone proclaim their faith in the Church they've come to love. We see the elderly and the young, finding value and grace in each other, as they learn from one another.

This Christmas brings us from chaos to credibility. I believe that God believes in us. God's grace is credible. We see this in the message from the Angel Gabriel to a young Mary who did not doubt the grace of God entering her life; a familiar life became different. She knew the comfort of what was and bravely welcomed the unknown facing her. Her trust and faith in God were witnessed in every action at work in her life. God asks no less of us, we must put our trust and belief in God and the God being born to us, not just at Christmas but every moment of every day. How will we live out this Christmas that has removed the world from the comfort of what was to what will be? Do we look to God only when we are in need? How generous are we with the God who is so gracious to us? Christmas is more than tinsel, paper, and packages, just as we are more than only one thought, one memory, or one experience. God believes in the credibility of every one of us. Our lives are everyday sacred moments to the one who gave His all for the love of humanity. Take time to wrap a memory or prayer to God and for one another. A gift that cannot be wrapped, glittered, or appropriately priced because it's already perfectly packaged, has been given for us by Christ. Remember, you are a terrific care package, one that is loved, revered, respected, and treasured.

From the care packages of our hearts here at St. Scholastica, we wish you all a very Merry Christmas. We thank you for all the ways you bless our lives. This year is no exception. We are grateful for the gifts you are to us!

Gister Kimberly Rose Probaska Prioress

## Message from the Development Office

In October 2019 as we set our Direction Statement for 2020-2026 (the complete statement is on page 4), we called ourselves to become a community focused on "radiating joyful hope." Restrictions on travel, vacations, visits, shopping, etc. necessitated by the coronavirus pandemic added an extra challenge to living out that focus. Our efforts were given a boost during our community retreat on October 18-24. Our director, Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND, titled the retreat "Finding Hope in a Beautiful and Imperfect World." That was just what we needed about seven months into living with the restrictions. Sister Melannie's uplifting, joyful spirit heightened our hope in this year of numerous challenges.

Looking for the beauty intertwined with the imperfection in the world around us gave us a more hopeful and joyful attitude toward life. One quote that Sister Melannie gave us for our reflection was especially meaningful for me. She quoted Kathleen Norris as saying, "Hope believes in the ever-present possibility of transformation."

With hope, the imperfection that we so easily see doesn't have to paralyze us into cynicism, the feeling that no matter what we do nothing will change. Hope helps us recognize that the beauty surrounding us can lessen the impact of the imperfection and can give us courage to attempt some improvement.



Sister Elise Forst, Development Director

That has been our experience these last months. The irritation and resistance to the restrictions and changes in response to Covid-19 have been lessened by our awareness of the blessings in our lives. Instead of focusing on places we cannot go and things we cannot do, we look at our beautiful new monastery, the wonderful grounds all around us, our regular schedule of prayer and meals, our Sisters with whom we share this unusual experience, and many friends who show their love and care of us by their kindness and thoughtfulness.

It is your support and generosity that are most helpful to us. In this season of Thanksgiving and Christmas, we express our gratitude to you. You are remembered daily in our prayer. We are grateful for your ongoing encouragement to find "hope in a beautiful and imperfect world." Our prayer is that you, too, can find hope in the beauties and imperfections of the world around you.

Gister Elise Forst
Development Director

Our mission: Seeking God in our life together and enlivened by daily prayer, we, the Benedictine Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas, respond to the needs of the people of God in a spirit of hospitality, simplicity, and reverence for one another and all creation.

Charism Statement (excerpt): We, the Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery, have responded to a call to seek God by a total gift of self in a religious community of celibate women, who make profession to live the Gospel according to the Rule of Benedict, the norms of the Federation of St. Gertrude, and the norms of the Monastery. By professing stability and fidelity to the monastic way of life, we promise to be faithful to our Benedictine tradition of prayer, work, and leisure, and to be a Christian community where persons are reverenced in their uniqueness and diversity.

#### Community Direction Statement

2020-2026

In response to our call to "listen with the ear of your heart," we will focus on becoming a more bonded monastic community radiating joyful hope

- by enriching our relationship with God and with each other;
  - by deepening our trust in God and in one another;
  - by engaging in honest courageous conversations.

As we move forward in faith, we will

- be attentive to the various stages of personal and communal transition;
  - be realistic and patient with all that needs to be accomplished;
- grow in openness to the Spirit as we come to an understanding of who we are and where we are going.

Adopted by the Community in October 2019 in preparation for the Election of a Prioress

#### Night

by Sister Louise Sharum

What color is night?

Black, of course.

But only black?

Are there not stars and moon,

and fireflies and city lights,

and lanterns and flashlights and porch lights

and the Northern Lights?

Maybe the really difficult times of life are our "nights."

Perhaps it is then we need to stand out in the open and see the moon and the stars and fireflies.

Much re-creation takes place at night in humans and in all of nature, though imperceptible and slow.

Although we may not have clarity even for the next step ahead of us, may we never lose sight of all that is to be seen at night, and be at peace knowing that the day has shadows and the night stars.

#### Obituaries

#### Sister Alice O'Brien

March 9, 1945 – October 17, 2020



Sister Alice O'Brien, OSB, age 75, a member of St. Scholastica Monastery, died suddenly at Chapel Ridge Health & Rehab on October 17, 2020. Alice Grace Birkenfeld was born on March 9, 1945 in Amarillo, Texas, to John and Doris Moore Birkenfeld. She attended St. Joseph School in Amarillo for her

primary education and then St. Mary's Academy for high school.

Alice married Daniel O'Brien in 1963 and had six children. After her divorce in 1984, she studied to be a registered nurse and then received a bachelor's degree in health arts from St. Francis College in Joliet, Illinois, all while lovingly raising her six children. For many years she worked as a registered nurse and was active in St. Thomas Parish in Elkhart, Indiana. Her favorite volunteer activities were with the pro-life movement.



Sisters Kimberly Prohaska, Cecelia Brickell, and Alice O'Brien at 6th Grade Vocation Day

Sister Alice loved her work as a nurse. After receiving an annulment of her marriage, she entered Our Lady of Peace Monastery in Columbia, Missouri, on August 3, 2000, where her sister, Sister Rose Maria Birkenfeld, was prioress. She became a novice in 2001 and made temporary profession on August 15, 2003. While in Columbia,

she was vocation director and worked at a nursing home. On March 17, 2008, she transferred to St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith, Arkansas, and renewed her temporary profession on August 15, 2008. On June 24, 2011, she made perpetual profession.

In the monastic community in Fort Smith, Sister Alice served as an assistant in the Infirmary, as a spiritual director, as assistant vocation director, and as formation director. She offered her talents as hairstylist after joining the monastery. She also took classes through the Little Rock School of Theology and volunteered at Heart to Heart Pregnancy Support Center in Fort Smith. She was well known for her Santa's Coffee Cake, candy cane cookies, and crocheted angels and tops for hand towels which were all popular items at the monastery's annual bake sale. Sister Alice balanced well her love and devotion for her children and grandchildren with her faithful commitment to her monastic duties as a member of the St. Scholastica community.

As her health declined, Sister Alice moved to the Infirmary and then to Chapel Ridge Health & Rehab.

She was preceded in death by her parents; her former husband, Daniel O'Brien; her son, Daniel; her brother, Charles Birkenfeld; and her sister, Sister Rose Maria Birkenfeld. She is survived by her sons, Stephen, Christopher, and Andy (Charda); her daughters, Tamara O'Brien and Cynthia O'Brien; her daughter-in-law, Arlene; many beloved grandchildren; her brothers, Martin Birkenfeld (Loretta) and Howard Birkenfeld (Annette); her nieces and nephews; and members of her Benedictine community.

The Mass for Christian Burial will be private due to Covid-19 with Father Les Farley as the presider. Arrangements are under the direction of Ocker-Putman Funeral Homes.

Memorials may be made to St. Scholastica Monastery Continuing Care Fund, P.O. Box 3489, Fort Smith, AR 72913.

## A Reflection by Sister Rosalie Ruesewald



Sisters Adrian Wewers (left), Rosalie Ruesewald, and Leona Marie Selig serve the community by drying dishes after dinner.

When agreeing to write a reflection on ministry, I had no idea what a challenge it would be. What is ministry anyway?

"Anything one does for another out of love," said Sr. Cecelia.

"Continuing Christ's work on Earth," added Sr. Elise."

"For me, it's an action word" said Sr. Maria.

A popular quote attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi speaks to the importance of action: "Always preach the Gospel; use words when necessary." Expressing the importance of action even more emphatically is the title of a song composed by Guatemalan singer Ricardo Arjona, "Jesus is a Verb, Not a Noun." He is saying Jesus and ministry can't be separated; you can't have one without the other.

All of us are familiar with the gifts of ordained ministry, which is official ministry. This reflection deals with general ministry.

In the Gospels, we see Jesus on the move, reaching out to those on the margins, teaching, healing, and sharing meals. In a poem, St. Teresa of Avila points out that today, "Christ has no body on earth but yours — no hands, no feet, on earth but yours..." As the familiar hymn goes, "We are many parts, We are all one body, and the gifts we have, we are given to share..."

There seems to be a real urgency in some situations, such as Mary hastening to be with Elizabeth in her time of need, the Syrophoenician woman's insistence that Jesus help her daughter. More recently we see this urgency with Pope Francis, who on his first pastoral visit rushed to Lampedusa to accompany the desperate migrants.

Today, the whole world is plagued by a pandemic with tremendous suffering and death. And worldwide there are hundreds of thousands of first responders, nurses, doctors, ambulance drivers, and others who give "their all" caring for others. Thousands have already given their lives.

Others who have laid down their lives for their friends include the four churchwomen who were martyred in El Salvador in December of 1980. Ten years ago, four of us went to that Central American country to attend the commemoration of the 30th anniversary of their brutal deaths by the military. In the middle of El Salvador's civil war and as the violence increased, the four women had refused to leave their ministry of accompaniment with the poor, even after the assassination of (now) Saint Oscar Romero earlier that year. I remember a quote from the homily of the Belgian priest who celebrated the Mass. He himself had lived through the civil war. He pointed out that Jesus never asked to be adored, worshiped or glorified. He only said, "Follow me." And being true to their ministry, that's exactly what Sisters Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel and laywoman Jean Donovan did.

Today I marvel at the countless ministries of Sisters around the world, still reaching out to those who are homeless, starving, uneducated, undocumented, and in other ways "marginalized." These Sisters are on the "same wavelength" as Pope Francis who is constantly reaching out. These ministries may not be as dangerous as those mentioned earlier in this reflection, but they are vitally important for the "common good." The National Catholic Reporter and the A.I.M. (Alliance for International Monasticism) newsletter are filled with accounts of their works.



With time, all works undergo change of some kind, as is clear here at Saint Scholastica Monastery. Although the works change, the primary ministry of monastics remains the same, i.e. to faithfully live the common life of prayer, works and leisure. Our 142-year history includes a membership at one time of over 300 Sisters. Then, in those times, we were able to staff a number of

schools, plus five hospitals and two orphanages. Today with 30 Sisters, two of our chief ministries are the Hesychia House of Prayer and a Spirituality and Spiritual Direction program.

For more than a century, our main work had been teaching. Now, our monastery's promotion of education still goes on, but in a vastly different way. It takes the form of a collaboration with our Benedictine brothers in Esquipulas, Guatemala. We sponsor a girls' scholarship program in their K-12 school (Colegio San Benito.) It's called the G.E.M. program (Girls' Education Matters.) We have been blessed with remarkable volunteers in this ministry. One such person is the G.E.M. Coordinator in Guatemala, Gloria Portillo. She speaks of ministry as her "responsibility as a

daughter of God." She defines ministry as "a permanent desire for service which fills my heart with happiness."



On her mission trips

with us to Guatemala, Maria Cabrera, R.N. (above), inspires girls living in poverty to dare to dream of a nursing future.

From all these musings, it seems the word ministry is too complex for exact definition. As I see it, Jesus explained it clearly when he said, "Whatever you did for the least of

these... you did for me."

Left: Gloria Portillo stands with several G.E.M. Scholars.

Right: Gloria Portillo lovingly guides Dulce María, a G.E.M. in the scholarship program



## Maria Elena Fisk Becomes Novice Siena

by Jennifer Burchett, Communications Director



Sister Kimberly Prohaska receives Maria Elena as a Novice.

"Doing something, as long as it is good, is doing God's work."

~ Maria Elena Fisk

In the days leading up to September 8, 2020, Maria Elena Fisk felt ready. The time had come for her to take the next step toward becoming a fully professed Sister by being accepted into the St. Scholastica Community as a Novice. As she recalls, the discernment process is filled with faith, work, and a whole lot of prayer.

Maria Elena entered St. Scholastica Monastery in December of 2019 and promptly began her studies in January of this year. The Formation Department, led by Sister Maria DeAngeli and Sister Elise Forst, is designed to help each woman who enters St. Scholastica on her journey, in other words, to help form her faith, work, and prayer life as a woman fulfilling God's plan for them.

"Basically, a lot of class and a lot of discernment," Maria Elena shares. "I had class in January with Novice Faustina and Sister Maria, I am learning the Holy Rule with Sister Kimberly, and I have another class with Father Les. My ministries they assigned to me is to help in the sacristy with Sister Stephanie and the Vocations Department."

For months, Maria Elena studied alongside the community's Novice, Faustina Nguyen. Eventually, as is recommended, Maria Elena sought a spiritual director with whom she may discuss questions related to her discernment process and chose Father John Antony of Immaculate Conception Parish in Fort Smith.

"My conversations with my spiritual director include my discernment, everything that I experience here and the major things that I feel are important to my discernment process; whatever I feel is significant I can bring up with him," she elaborates. "He helps keep my focus on why I'm here, helps me find my path, and helps me focus on what God really wants me to do. Having a spiritual director has been an important part of the discernment process."

After nearly nine months, Maria Elena was ready for the next milestone in her journey.

On September 8, her future sisters and Father John Antony gathered in chapel to receive Maria Elena as a Novice. As with many events in 2020, Maria Elena's ceremony was private due to the coronavirus pandemic. And also in stride with events and circumstances that have been shifted and adjusted, the blessing of the day was immense.

"It was a humbling experience to stand in front of the community because they accepted me and it is a very, well, humbling experience to join them. Emotionally, I was nervous."

Like many women have done before her, she chose to change her name. Prior to September 8,
Maria Elena had selected Saint Catherine of Siena as her patron. It is tradition that the Postulant gives three

possible names to the Prioress, and the Prioress selects one of them. Going into the ceremony on September 8, Maria Elena did not know what name Sister Kimberly had chosen.

"My favorite moment was knowing my name. Nobody knew what Sister Kimberly was going to pick. I thought she was going to pick Katrina. I was really surprised because Siena was the least of the three that I expected her to pick," she smiles.

By the end of the ceremony, Maria Elena Fisk had become Novice Siena. The community rejoiced in her 'Yes'. The Sisters and Father John gathered in the dining room for the traditional cake to ring in the community's newest member. These days, Novice Siena continues her studies and looks forward to making her first profession. As she sees it, discernment is a life-long process, and one to which she is devoted. Faith, work, and prayer are her guides.

"I am at peace with where I am now. I look forward to being more immersed in the monastic life, doing different kinds of ministries, and hopefully doing some outside ministries once I become a professed Sister," concludes Novice Siena.

Join us in congratulating Novice Siena on her welcome into our St. Scholastica Community!



Sister Kimberly Prohaska celebrates with Novice Siena

#### Trusting Grace:

by Sister Elise Forst, Development Director & Jennifer Burchett, Communications Director

On October 30, we joyfully gathered in a private community celebration to officially install Sister Kimberly Prohaska as our thirteenth prioress. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the usual two months between election of a prioress and her installation stretched into nine months. In the end we gave up on our hope to have a public celebration, but as we all agree, it was a blessedly beautiful moment in our community's history.

Moving from Sister Maria DeAngeli as our twelfth prioress to Sister Kimberly as the thirteenth was a lengthy process. In the months leading up to June 8, 2018, when Sister Maria's term was completed, the community was deeply involved with completing our new monastery, making plans to move into it, and adjusting to the move. There was neither time nor energy to devote to meaningful discernment and election.

The Federation of St. Gertrude, of which St. Scholastica Monastery is a member, recommended that the community

request an administrator be appointed for a few months. After the community agreed to this arrangement, Sister Jeanne Weber, the President of the Federation, appointed Sister Kimberly in May 2019 to serve as administrator, beginning on June 8 when Sister Maria's term expired. By the fall of 2019, we felt ready to begin the discernment process for choosing a prioress to replace the administrator.

In October 2019, we gathered to prepare for the election that was to be held in January 2020. The term of the new prioress would be for six years because in July 2018, the community had decided to change the length of term for a prioress from a four-year term with possible

re-election to one six-year term without possible re-election. Part of the discernment in October 2019 was to set a community direction statement for 2020-2026 (see page 4).

As we entered election, we kept our community direction statement close to our hearts as we discerned which Sister would be the best to lead our community in the direction we seek to go. On January 20, 2020, our community chose Sister Kimberly to be our Prioress for the next six years. The road from discernment to election was lengthy, but the Sisters were filled with peace and confidence as it unfolded.

"I never saw myself serving in a leadership role, nor did I envision being the Prioress of the community," shares Sister Kimberly.

It was with humility and wisdom that Sister Kimberly accepted this responsibility, and in the months leading up to her twice-cancelled Installation Ceremony, Sister Kimberly began a discernment process of her own.



Sister Jeanne Weber, Sister Kimberly Prohaska, and Bishop Anthony Taylor

#### Sister Kimberly Installed as Prioress

"I believe it is essential that I avail myself of my sisters and their needs, including caring for their spiritual and physical well-being," elaborates Sister Kimberly.

Not long after being elected Prioress, the coronavirus pandemic made its way to the United States and Arkansas. True to her word, Sistser Kimberly rose to the occasion and put the health and safety of the sisters first by enacting protocols designed to protect and reduce the spread of Covid-19. This was an incredible task to encounter so soon upon being elected. And yet, Sister Kimberly did so with the strength of a leader that St. Scholastica needs in this moment of history. Sister Kimberly acknowledges that currently the biggest challenge for the community are stressors around the pandemic.

"A sometimes blurred vision of temporary inconveniences and the pandemic's effects have yet to reveal what will happen eventually to the world. Even as we live our ordinary life, we cannot escape from this holding pattern. The uncertainty of what the future world will be like makes us long for what was. The Covid 19 Pandemic has forced us to rediscover what is essential and what is less so."

When the community would otherwise be planning a public Installation Ceremony, Sister Kimberly and the rest of the community were working together against a global pandemic.

Eventually, the Sisters did as they usually do, embrace and grow. They agreed to have a private Installation Ceremony on October 30, 2020. Though family and friends were not able to attend, it was a joyous occasion. Bishop Taylor presided at Mass and the Installation was led by the Federation President, Sister Jeanne Weber. Just as many things in life do not turn out as expected, their beauty is in no way tarnished. Such was the Installation Ceremony of St. Scholastica's thirteenth Prioress. Lucky, indeed.

"My theme for installation is Trusting Grace. I will continue to hold this trust every day as I serve as Prioress for St. Scholastica. I hope to lead more by example than by word, to listen deeply and attentively to my sisters and trusted advisors."

Please join us in rejoicing with our community and our Prioress, Sister Kimberly Prohaska, whose leadership has been a blessing to us all.



Above: Sister Jeanne leads the Installation beside Sister Kimberly. Sister Maria DeAngeli looks on. Below: Father Les Farley prays during the service.



## A Profession of Gratitude

by Jennifer Burchett, Communications Director

The year was 2017. I was a recently returned-to-work homemaker and writer, turned recently-laid-off **1** nonprofit director, navigating my next path in life. That's when Deacon Greg Pair, then President of my former employer, HOPE Campus, informed me of a little known position with St. Scholastica Monastery. Turned out, the Sisters were hiring a Communications Director, and though my judgment deemed it a lost cause, I applied.

Sure enough, I got an interview. Though it was a pleasant process, I was very nervous. What's the catch, I'd ask myself. Eventually the question of my religious denomination came up and I thought, this is it, the moment they realize I'm not the right person to carry their communications mantle. Without hesitation, I shared my nondenominational beliefs. And sure enough, they didn't seem to mind. Was I missing something?

My first day on the job was in March of 2018. Even though I had gone through the interview process and answered every question honestly, I was sure they had hired the wrong 'Jennifer' (that was the silly way I rationalized the situation – I know, absurd!). I thought, why would the Sisters hire somebody of no religious denomination to be their communications director, one of the most spiritually important jobs for a religious community? For months I quietly wandered around the monastery, reading their history books, carefully viewing and watching, all the while thinking to myself that they had made a mistake; eventually they would realize they hired the wrong person and delicately let me go.



Below: St. Scholastica Sisters stand with Jennifer Burchett (middle) in the monastery narthex.

Weeks passed, months passed, and slowly I began to question whether they had made a mistake at all; perhaps it was I who was mistaken. For just as easily as the sisters curiously asked me questions at lunch, they also accepted the fact that I was not Catholic, that I had no religious affiliation whatsoever, nor the desire to ever, ever adopt one, thank you very much. My cathedral, as I shared on occasion, was that of the wilds of nature. If they did mind that I wasn't Catholic, they surely didn't show it. The only thing they ever showed me was love.

Over the many months and years that I spent working alongside the sisters, eventually, gradually, I came to know them, a feat at the time of which I had no idea the true implications.

Sister Kimberly, the first Sister I ever met, has an undeniable effervescence to her. My supervisor, Sister Elise, is as kind as she is pragmatic, a combination that matched my own need for empathy and organization. And, might I add, she is as brilliant and as sharp as they come. Sister Adrian is one of the jolliest people I've had the privilege of knowing; Sister Rachel, so shrewd yet gentle; Sister Regina, so serious and so devoted to caring for her sisters, both the vowed and the biological; Sister Madeline Bariola (Mad B for short), who can hang out over a day of gardening or a glass of wine (wink - wink) just the same. I could go on and on. All of them, so unique, so special, so devoted to their religious community as they are to acceptance of the gifts bestowed to them by God. Different, yes, and yet so unified. So beautiful.

And then there was Sister Macrina, my dear, beautiful, slightly testy and at times neurotic Sister Macrina, whose spirituality and depth of words whisked up the writer in me to do more, to be more, and to listen more. And that I did.

Then, it clicked. The catch, it seemed, was always on me. For every time I doubted myself, there was a sister who supported me; for every time I thought I wasn't a good fit or was too different, there was a sister who ministered otherwise.

The sisters, whose faith in One God so strongly transcends any one person's apparent difference, ministered to me not with words, but through works; it was through the gifts of being themselves that ultimately spoke louder than anything they would or could ever say. Their hearts burst with true faith, amazing faith, amazing faith in One God, that it was only a matter of time before I saw it; before, shall I

say, I listened. With One God, we are all one people. Our differences, and diversity itself, was not the crux of faith, but the cause of it, and to truly embody One God does not mean to be ignorant to difference, but to simply love anyway. Acquiring this faith was a natural, inevitable process of the exact job they hired me to do, communicate. After all, is not half of communication listening?

In her book "The Flowing Grace of Now", Sister Macrina shares the following: "The flowing grace of now is never finished. It is ever flowing into the next grace, the next joy, the next awakening, the next sorrow, the next piece of unfolding life." I daresay, it is not simply from one piece of time to the next that we must look, but to the next person, as we are folded inextricably into one another, each a joy, a gift, in and of ourselves.

After going through RCIA with Diane Willis at St. Boniface for an extended period of time due to the coronavirus pandemic (that's a whole other story!), I was confirmed and received into the church on November 1, 2020, All Saints Day. With Father Les in front of me delivering a beautiful homily, it seemed fitting that he, who ministered to me on several occasions, brought me into the church. Behind me stood Sister Elise, my sponsor, my teacher and friend. And though physically missing, the sister with whom I spiritually connected with perhaps more than many others was there to do just what Sister Elise and I had asked her to do, to give me my patron saint. I chose Macrina.

When my family and I returned home from the monastery that day I organized all of my gifts on the living room coffee table, where they stayed for an entire week. I wouldn't move them. I wouldn't touch them. I'd just sit and look at them, perplexed, for some reason called to do so. Then I looked beyond those gifts, to the time when I started working for the sisters, and I saw the true gifts clearly. The truest gifts they gave me had been given long ago, and still today, the gifts of accepting themselves and others, equally.

I'm 36 years old. I think, there will always be a part of me that is untamed, who craves the wilds of nature, but for my faith, I cannot escape nor would I want to, my call. This change in my life is the marrying of two ways of life, but, sure enough, they "flow" into one another gracefully.

To Diane Willis and the St. Boniface Community, thank you so, so much. To my friends, the Sisters, it is from the bottom of my heart that I say thank you. Serving as your communications director has been one of the greatest honors of my life. Thank you.

#### Vocation Elation

by Sister Judith Timmerman, Vocation Director

As St. Scholastica's new vocation director, I have been spending time in prayer pondering some different questions about religious life today.

First, who are we and what does it mean to have a monastic religious vocation? For Benedictines, it is a call to give oneself completely to Christ, to live in community with other women seeking God, and to live a life of radical contrast to the values of the world in this life. We base our life on the Rule of St. Benedict. We profess obedience, fidelity to the monastic way of life, and stability in a particular monastery or abbey. Poverty and chastity are implied in the vow of fidelity to the monastic way of life. As a Benedictine Sister, I am able to pray, work, recreate, and seek God with other committed women in a faith community. Their faithfulness to prayer and seeing the guest that comes to the door as Christ, has helped me to become a better person and a better Christian. It also gives me the opportunity to live a life of service. As our Sr. Macrina once said, "if you live alone, whose feet will you wash?" Our ministries of spiritual direction, solidarity with the poor, hospitality and commitment to peace are the way we live Gospel values. Just as Jesus formed a community and made time for the children who wanted his attention and the woman who wanted to touch his robe, we too make time for God's "little ones" and give our attention to those who need us. As the community has grown smaller, we have begun to know and love each other in a deeper way than we could when we were large. It has become, in fact, "our finest hour" and that example of love, I believe, is what has drawn our women in formation to join us.

Another question that is important right now is: How do we reach new discerners in this time of COVID-19, when we can't travel, participate in vocation discernment events, or invite women to "come and see"? Well, they have to "come and see" virtually! We have had a presence on the internet for some time now. We have a website, Facebook pages, and other social media accounts. But, they have never seemed as important as they do right now. Other religious communities are in the same boat. So, on the one hand, there seems to be a lot of competition. On the other hand, we must believe that God is in control and guiding young women to where He wants them to be. With that in mind, many religious

communities are working to help each other and share ideas and technological knowledge. I know quite a bit about computers, but the idea of giving an online discernment retreat was a bit daunting. I am grateful to other vocation directors who have been so helpful.



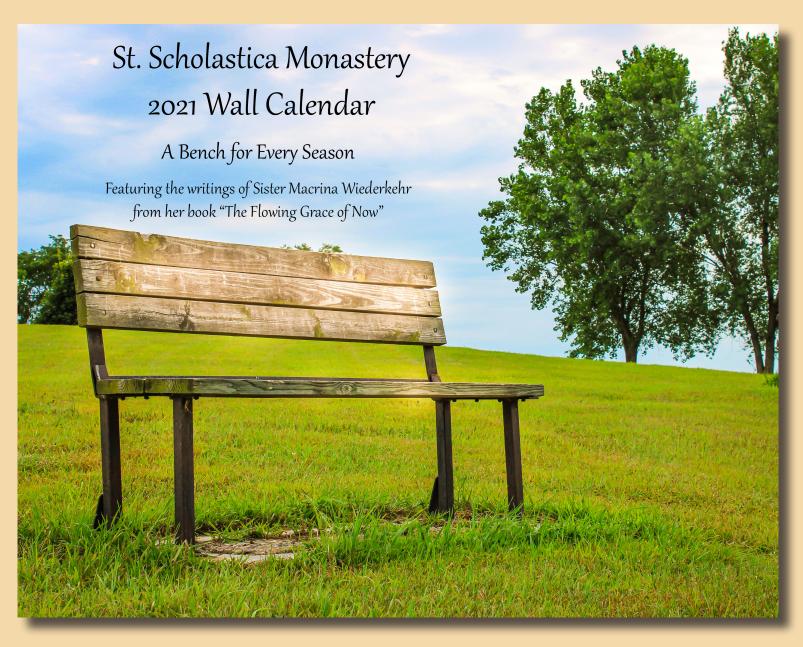
Sister Judith Timmerman, Vocation Director

The third question I have been pondering is: How do we make ourselves more attractive to younger women? We have two novices, but both are older. As I mentioned above, the most important attraction is (or should be) Christian love as lived in community; working through the difficulties of day-to-day life and growing in holiness through our lived experience together. But, this is not something that you can explain to younger women who feel called to religious life. Much like one who is wooing a lover, we have to make ourselves attractive first, then the deeper reality will become clearer to those who have a true vocation. So, we have to ask ourselves, "What is drawing young women to religious life today? What is important to them? What may we need to change within ourselves and in community life to make it more attractive?

The vocations are out there. The number of young women entering religious life has increased a lot in the past decade. We have ways to reach them and the love to attract them. But, right now, they are not joining us. What are we missing? Pray that we are faithful and open enough to have courageous conversations about this issue and to trust in God who will reveal all things.

"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:9)

#### Order Your 2021 Calendar

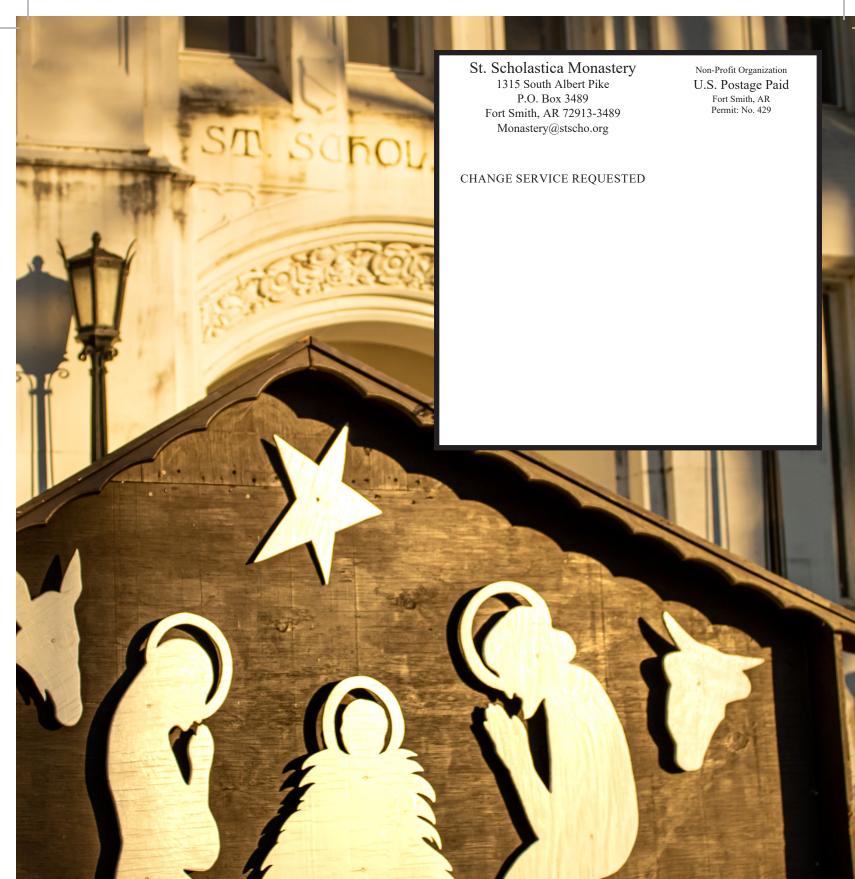


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