



HORIZONS

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Message from the Prioress



Sister Kimberly Prohaska, Prioress

Thinking over the past year we have walked through, I couldn't help but wonder how wonderful each of us is and how blessed we are to have each other in this monastic life. Just this year alone, we closed the door to the uncertainty of Covid only to open our hearts to new possibilities of what God is calling us to become. We have embraced letting go of our former monastery home and deepened our conversations and understanding of each other. We have seen how the hours and days take us to new health concerns for ourselves, our families, and each other. We have discovered that it is okay to take care of ourselves and accept someone else's limitations. We have welcomed new people into our midst while saying goodbye to others.

In coming to understand who we are as Simply Benedictine women, our call from God is just as important as it was the day we first professed it, maybe more so. We are more transparent, further invested, and more needed than ever before to a Church and a world embracing a nonstructural faith, but a preference for a spirituality that does not accept formalized religion as we now know it. We are becoming something more than we know. We may not fully know what that becoming is, but whatever it is, God has us in the making. We are discovering what is meant by our Belovedness. We are older, smaller in number, and traveling a very unfamiliar path, yet together we are discovering that how we define who we are is entirely up to us. We are not what we were one

hundred and forty-five years ago, not what we were in 1930, 1970, or 2020. We are who we are in this moment, appreciating what has been and, at the same time, catching glimpses of what our Belovedness is calling us to become.

Now is the time for us to look at our Belovedness with fresh eyes, full of clear vision for what God has asked us to do for both today and the tomorrow we hope to see. We are all someone's beloved. We are someone else's burden. We are someone else's blessing. We have challenges that require courage and trust. We have made mistakes to learn from, and we have to discern deeper for the Belovedness God is asking us to be. Who are we as monastics in the modern world? We need to release expectations and refuse to live as the entitled. We are the beloved who must put down judgmental attitudes about how we live this common life together. We are Belovedness and need to honor that Belovedness when we struggle, when we grieve, when we see our fragility, when we see our wisdom, our joy, our hope, and our gift anew to one another. Our Beloved sees us as beloved. We are nothing less than that. We need to see our belovedness together. Every moment of your life, our life, has led to this. We are by our very breath great Belovedness. Our Belovedness is expressed in more ways than we can ever know. We live it in pain and in happiness. We live it in disappointment and in fulfillment. We live it partially and completely. We live it jointly and uniquely. As Sarah Kroger sings in the song, "Belovedness", it's time for us to own our belovedness. God smiled when God made us; we all have been through so much. We are called to live our resiliency of heart in the deep faith and spirit of St. Scholastica. We are called to accept each other in love as we are by our promise of Obedience, Conversatio Morum, and Stability. We are called to embrace love and trust the path God has given us as Simply Benedictine Women.

--Sister Kimberly Rose Prohaska, OSB
Prioress

*Adapted from Sister Kimberly's reflection to the Sisters at the end of their Monastic Chapter meeting on July 26

Message from the Office of Mission Advancement

We are grateful for all who contributed to our recent appeal letter asking for help in caring for our elderly Sisters and for our grounds. Benedict has a chapter in his Rule on the importance of care for the sick and elderly. He does not have a chapter on care for the grounds of the monastery, but he is insistent in many chapters that the goods and property of the monastery be cared for and kept in order. In chapter 31, he tells the procurator, who is in charge of maintenance of the monastery's property, to "regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar, aware that nothing is to be neglected." An important part of the "goods" of the monastery is the land for which we are responsible.

Being good stewards of our land is a part of our monastic promise of stability. When Benedictines establish a monastery, they come to stay. Some apostolic communities may come to a place to meet a need in the area, train others to continue the work, then move on to meet another need in another area. That is good and needed but is not the Benedictine way. For Benedictines, their continuing presence in the place itself is important.

For centuries monasteries have considered the beauty of their surroundings, both inside and outside their buildings, a part of their mission. Beauty and order contribute to a prayerful and reflective atmosphere for the Sisters and our guests. We here at St. Scholastica's enjoy the fruits of the hard work and love that our groundskeepers have put into our grounds since they arrived here in Fort Smith in 1925. For the past twenty-five years, Sister Pierre Vorster faithfully built on the work of the groundskeepers who had gone before her - Sisters Alexis Fritz, Mary

John Wiederkehr, Frances Teresa Adams, and others. In Sister Pierre's memory, we are working this year on many projects that were dear to her heart.

One is the "Come Apart and Rest a While" gazebo that has been near our cemetery since 1941. It is getting a new roof and facelift. Trees are an important part of our grounds. Sister Pierre worked diligently to replace fallen trees with species native to our area. This year storms have felled many trees. We are working to replace them.

Thank you for helping us honor Sister Pierre's dreams for our grounds through your gifts to our annual appeal. We invite you to come visit us and let our grounds renew and refresh you.

Sister Elise Forst, OSB



Sister Elise Forst



The Come Apart and Rest a While gazebo with its new roof and some repairs

In Loving Memory

Sister Andrea Loran

August 26, 1926 - July 13, 2023

Sister Andrea Loran, age 96, a member of St. Scholastica Monastery, died July 13, 2023, at Chapel Ridge Health & Rehab in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Sister Andrea was born August 26, 1926, in Rhineland, Texas, to Liberatus and Bertha Strubel Loran, and given the name Helen. She was the eighth child of eleven born to the Loran family. Sister Andrea entered St. Scholastica Monastery as a candidate on September 2, 1946, joining her sister, Sister Martha, as a Benedictine. Following her novitiate, Sister Andrea made her first profession on June 24, 1949, and her final profession on June 24, 1952.

Sister Andrea was gifted in hospitality, nurturing both body and soul in the culinary fields. She ministered in Paris, Fort Smith, North Little Rock, Clarksville, and Shoal Creek, Arkansas. Sister Andrea served in the dietary departments of two hospitals in Clarksville, Arkansas, and Booneville, Missouri, for eight years. In 1997 she served as a core team member of Hesychia House of Prayer, in New Blaine, Arkansas, until her retirement in 2009.

She attended Fontbonne College in Clayton, Missouri, in dietetics and food service. As long as she was able, Sister Andrea enjoyed cooking and tending to flower gardens. She loved to read a variety of authors and topics. She was a hard worker and made tasks seem effortless. Sister Andrea was a gentle and approachable person with an infectious laugh. She truly knew what it meant to live Benedictine hospitality. She was dedicated to her family, faithfully keeping in touch through letter-writing and telephone calls.



Sister Andrea Loran, OSB

The Sisters at St. Scholastica Monastery thank Sister Andrea's caregivers at St. Scholastica's and at Chapel Ridge Health & Rehab for their loving care for her. She was preceded in death by her parents and her siblings: Ralph Andrew and wife Bonnie Loran, Sister Martha Loran, OSB, Fidelis (Slim) and wife Agnes Rose Loran, Monica and husband Troy Myers, Mary and husband Alphonse Kuehler, Daniel Loran, Roselia and husband Roy Pokorny, Ruth Loran, Jeanette and husband Marvin Zeissel, and Vincent (Brother Eric) Loran, OSB of Subiaco Abbey. She is survived by her many beloved nieces and nephews and members of her Benedictine family.

Oblate Mildred Marie Baillio

August 11, 1927 – June 3, 2021

Mildred Marie Baillio was born on August 11, 1927 in Fort Smith, Arkansas, to Carl and Cecelia Goebel. She passed away on June 3, 2021, at the age of 93, in Fort Smith. She was preceded in death by her parents, and her sister, Lucy Kathryn Hartmeier. She is survived by her son, James W. Baillio, of Fort Smith. Mildred made her oblation on December 20, 1981.

Her committal service was held June 11, 2021, at Holy Cross Cemetery.

Oblate Frances Mary Burgener Beck

October 10, 1926 - August 29, 2023

Frances Mary Burgener Beck was born October 10, 1926, in St. Vincent, Arkansas, to Lee Burgener and Margaret Briggler Burgener. She passed away on August 29, 2023, at the age of 96, in her home in Solgohachia, Arkansas.

She was a member of St. Mary Catholic Church in St. Vincent, where she served as a member of the Altar Society, choir, a Eucharistic Minister, lector, and religious education teacher. Frances made oblation March 10, 1985, at St. Vincent.

She was preceded in death by her parents; her husband, Ferdinand Beck; and her sons, William “Bill” Beck and Tim Beck; brothers, Luke, Sam, Charles, Edward, and infant Edward; and sisters, Lucille and infant Helen.

She is survived by her son, Dan (Diana) Beck of St. Vincent; daughters, Margie (Alan) Halman of St. Vincent and Sharon (Gerald) Paladino of Morrilton; brother, Norbert (Mary) Burgener; and many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, family and friends.



Oblate Frances Riedmueller Beck

October 29, 1926-December 8, 2020

Frances Riedmueller Beck, age 94, of St. Vincent, Arkansas, passed away on December 8, 2020. She was born on October 29, 1926, in Morrilton, Arkansas, the tenth of eleven children born to George and Elizabeth (Laux) Riedmueller. Frances graduated from Sacred Heart High School in 1944. She was a member of St. Mary Catholic Church in St. Vincent, where she served as a member of the Altar Society, choir, a CCD teacher to the youth of the parish, and was also a member of the Catholic Women's Union. Frances Riedmueller Beck made oblation November 1, 1995, at St. Vincent.

Frances was preceded in death by her husband, Henry Beck, Sr., her parents, and nine of her brothers and sisters: George, Johnny, Aloys, twins Edwin and Emil, and Monsignor Leo Anthony Riedmueller, Elizabeth Todd, Marie Boeckman, and Rita Meyer.

She is survived by three sons, Dennis (Gerri) of Greenbrier, Ted (Donna) of St. Vincent, and Henry, Jr. of St. Vincent; two daughters, Georganne of Morrilton and Emma Fae of Cleveland, Georgia; and five grandsons and granddaughters as well as great-grandsons and great-granddaughters.

Oblate Susan Marie Novak

August 9, 1958 - June 25, 2023

Susan Novak, 64, of Florissant, Missouri, passed away June 25, 2023, in her home. Susan was born in Price County, Wisconsin to Andy and Emily Novak on August 9, 1958. She lived in Kennan, Wisconsin, until her family moved to Burbank, Illinois and later to Florissant, Missouri. Susan earned both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in the area of mathematics. She studied astronomy and recently earned a certificate in computer programming. Susan had liturgy training and was a lector, choir member, and liturgy committee member at St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish. Susan made oblation on February 11, 2006, in Columbia, Missouri.

She was preceded in death by her parents and by her brother, David Novak.

Around the Monastery

Annual Alumnae Reunion

September 9 through 10, 2023, Saint Scholastica Monastery welcomed the Saint Scholastica Academy Alumnae Association for their annual reunion. The alumnae returned to the grounds of the monastery to gather for fellowship and to honor their academy days.

St. Scholastica Academy first opened its doors to students in 1924, continuing the work that began at St. Joseph Academy in Shoal Creek, Arkansas. The building was both a home for the Sisters and a boarding school for students. In 1944, St. Scholastica Academy solely functioned as a high school. In 1958, the academy moved out of the monastery building into a new building, just north of the monastery.

The alumnae of St. Scholastica Academy travel from many different states, and are welcomed “home” each year. The Sisters hold a special Alumnae Mass on Sunday mornings in the monastery chapel, with a brunch afterward for a time to eat together and reminisce. “Once a Scho girl, always a Scho girl!”



Father Joseph Chan, monastery chaplain, presided at the Alumnae Mass.



Alumnae Dorothy Werner Sullivan '60 and Debbie Wewers Bentley '64 participated as gift bearers in the Alumnae Mass.



The Alumnae Mass at the monastery before brunch and fellowship.

Welcome to Our New Employees

Myrtis Clark, Maintenance - April

Joyce Stephens, Mission Advancement Office - May

Rogelio “Roy” Esquivel, Maintenance - August

Cindy Horney, Food Service - August

Thank you, **Katie Shields**, for managing the St. Scholastica Monastery
Gift Shop from October 2020 until January 2022
and continuing to volunteer at times.

Don't miss the annual Saint Scholastica Bake Sale!



Saturday, December 9, 2023
8 a.m. - 4 p.m.



Our baking Benedictines will have breads, jams, jellies, cookies,
pies, cakes, and other items - all to benefit the Sisters!



Vocation Corner

By Sr. Siena Fisk, OSB

This past year, the community of St. Scholastica Monastery in Fort Smith has had the pleasure of hosting several young women who are discerning their possible call to a religious vocation. These women experienced a taste of our monastic life following the Rule of St. Benedict as it is lived here at St. Scholastica.

Tannah Smith from Arizona joined us in our Advent and Christmas Liturgies and celebrations when she came for a visit from the 18th through the 31st of December 2022.

Ezmah Perrodin from Springdale, Arkansas, stayed with us for a week-long discernment retreat from the 20th through the 25th of March 2023. To name a few of her activities, she had lessons on Benedictine spirituality, craft-making, and a tour of both Hesychia House of Prayer and Subiaco Abbey. She later returned for a visit from the 2nd through the 4th of September.

Jaqueline Perez from Fort Smith, came for a brief visit from March 24-25, 2023. She was able to join Ezmah for some of the activities which they both enjoyed.

Please include these young women in your prayers as they discern the path on which the Lord is leading them.



Tannah Smith during our 2022 Advent and Christmas Liturgies.



Prioriess Sister Kimberly Prohaska, Jaqueline Perez, Ezmah Perrodin, and Sister Siena Fisk.

Sister Madeline Bariola's Memento of Mission Work

St. Joseph Center in Little Rock thrives as a peaceful, inspirational place, providing programs that honor the nurturing spirit of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Scholastica who served as caretakers of children during the days the facility was called St. Joseph's Orphanage. After the Diocese of Little Rock, who owns the building, announced plans to sell the building in 2008, a group formed a non-profit organization which leased the building and agreed to maintain it. Sisters Madeline Bariola and Dolores Vincent Bauer, both of whom spent many years working at St. Joseph's when it was an orphanage and later a child care center, attend as many of St. Joseph's fundraisers as they can.

When asked about her time at St. Joseph's, Sister Madeline's love for the children and mission she served shines from the tears in her eyes and the light of her laugh as she recalls the joys and sorrows of her life at the orphanage. She tells heart-warming stories, like visiting Matthew Kresse in the area for elderly residents and watching baseball games on his small black and white television; she relates stories of nursing sick children through illness and the sleepless hours of such care, while laughing as she remembers the quirky antics of some of the children; she describes the effort behind providing charming, meaningful Christmases for the children who had so little. Her stories bring to life a past that changed the lives of so many.

Sister Madeline's deep love draws her back to St. Joseph's for their annual fundraisers, but this year the Lord had something special for her to treasure as a connection to those beloved years at the orphanage. She and Sister Dolores Vincent Bauer made plans to attend the Lettuce Grow fundraiser event on September 15. Sandy DeCoursey, director of St. Joseph Center, offered the Sisters two free raffle tickets in honor of the shared history of the Benedictine Sisters and St. Joseph Center. Sisters Dolores Vincent and Madeline perused the items donated for raffle, and Sister Madeline found a treasure — a beautiful photograph of St. Joseph Center with the hallmark statue of



St. Joseph in the foreground of the photo. She prayed to God, humbly asking for the photo that had so resonated with her love for the orphanage and her time there. Sister Dolores Vincent was asked to pull the winning tickets out of each basket. She teased Sister Madeline about pulling her own name for the photograph. But God had heard the desire of her heart.

"I thought she was joking," Sister Madeline said. Sister Dolores Vincent announced Sister Madeline's name as the winner of the very item for which she had prayed. Sister Madeline was able to take her memento back with her to St. Scholastica Monastery: "Those children, they may not remember me, but they were some of the sweetest children. I love that place."

The photo on canvas (photo by Elaine Jones) may seem to some a small thing, but to Sister Madeline, it is an invaluable gift, a tangible reminder of her years at St. Joseph's Orphanage.

The Grottoes: Alumnae's Treasured Memories

The Sisters recently hosted the St. Scholastica Academy Alumnae annual reunion. It did not take long to notice how much nostalgia and love the alumnae felt for the monastery grounds. According to instructor Dr. Kelly Jennings of the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith, the Latin root for the word "alumnae" can be translated as "one who is nourished". She said, "The root of everything is who feeds us!" When one listens to the accounts of the academy alumnae, one can hear that they have experienced both past and present nourishment from the Sisters of St. Scholastica and their surrounding grounds.

There is one place on the grounds the former students all seem to hold dear – the grottoes. "I remember taking pictures in front of the grotto every time we went up to see my sisters when they were at the academy, then it was my time. It was like the center point," said alumna Mary Hart. "How many times I went to that grotto during my four years at the academy," said Sharon Brown Pohlmeier.

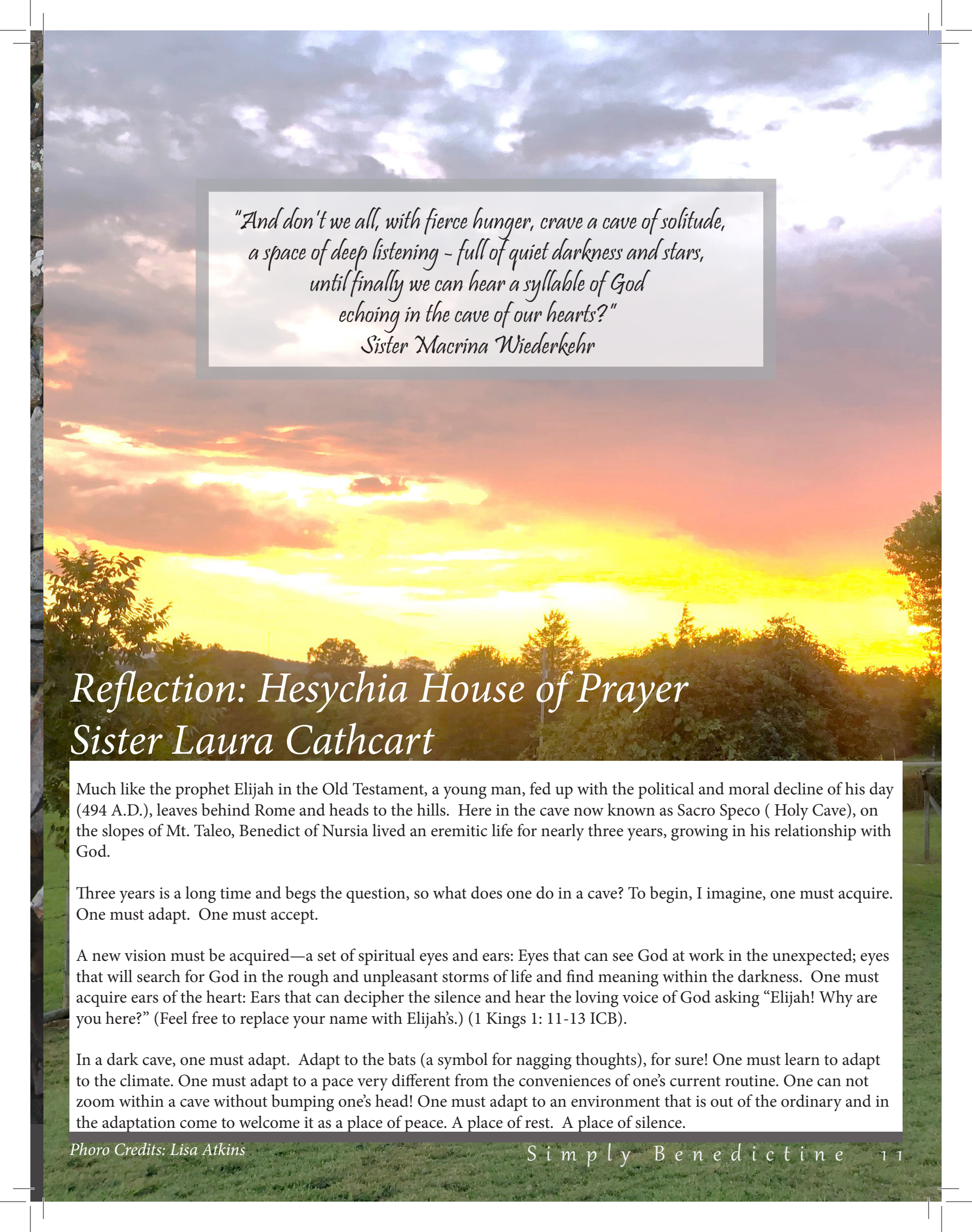
In ancient history, the first grottoes were caves. These caves served as places where people sought the divine. St. Benedict is famous for his use of a cave as a monastic cell in Italy – Sacro Speco. Caves hold a connection for humanity as places of quiet, of safety, of seclusion. For many years these sacred spaces were forgotten, until Our Lady appeared in Lourdes, in a cave, to St. Bernadette. Man-made grottoes, as a kind of shrine, gained in popularity.

The grounds of St. Scholastica were no exception. The grotto, sponsored by the Alumnae Association, was built in the 1930s. Additions came afterward, with statues of Our Lady of Lourdes and Saint Bernadette in 1937 and Saint Benedict in 1938. It seems fitting that the current alumnae should feel such a deep connection to the grottoes since the origins of the Saint Scholastica grottoes reside with the Alumnae Association of the earlier days of the academy.

The grottoes of the monastery, next to large plantings of iris and old rock walkways, are still lovingly maintained. Some families still take pictures for special events. These beautiful areas of prayer and meditation are still a cherished feature on the grounds.



Circa 1941: Barbara Fischer-Fitts '41, second in line at a May Crowning service (Photo provided by David Fitts).



*"And don't we all, with fierce hunger, crave a cave of solitude,
a space of deep listening - full of quiet darkness and stars,
until finally we can hear a syllable of God
echoing in the cave of our hearts?"*

Sister Macrina Wiederkehr

Reflection: Hesychia House of Prayer

Sister Laura Cathcart

Much like the prophet Elijah in the Old Testament, a young man, fed up with the political and moral decline of his day (494 A.D.), leaves behind Rome and heads to the hills. Here in the cave now known as Sacro Speco (Holy Cave), on the slopes of Mt. Taleo, Benedict of Nursia lived an eremitic life for nearly three years, growing in his relationship with God.

Three years is a long time and begs the question, so what does one do in a cave? To begin, I imagine, one must acquire. One must adapt. One must accept.

A new vision must be acquired—a set of spiritual eyes and ears: Eyes that can see God at work in the unexpected; eyes that will search for God in the rough and unpleasant storms of life and find meaning within the darkness. One must acquire ears of the heart: Ears that can decipher the silence and hear the loving voice of God asking “Elijah! Why are you here?” (Feel free to replace your name with Elijah’s.) (1 Kings 1: 11-13 ICB).

In a dark cave, one must adapt. Adapt to the bats (a symbol for nagging thoughts), for sure! One must learn to adapt to the climate. One must adapt to a pace very different from the conveniences of one’s current routine. One can not zoom within a cave without bumping one’s head! One must adapt to an environment that is out of the ordinary and in the adaptation come to welcome it as a place of peace. A place of rest. A place of silence.

In a cave, one comes to accept. One comes to accept the magnanimity of a structure that was created by the mind of a higher power greater than yourself – a structure that was formed slowly over time that is not static, but is teeming with life and continually changing. A cave is a place that has endless possibilities of discovery if one is brave enough to venture into it, if one is brave enough to sit, to be with the deafening silence within it.

Sacro Speco is the name of the cave to which God called St. Benedict. Hesychia House of Prayer is the ‘cave’ to which God may very well be inviting you to dwell in for some time.

Hesychia House of Prayer in New Blaine, Arkansas, resides at the top of a hill in the Arkansas River Valley. A set of hermitages dot the landscape of rolling hills, grazing cows and wooded walking trails. And a dog. St. Benedict had a crow as a companion. The Sisters at Hesychia have a very intuitive, loving dog (Scholastica, Scho for short) who will charm her way into your heart. While the landscape may look different from Sacro Speco; the call to follow God’s call is the same. It is a place that is provided for all of us to come in which we are offered hospitality in the tradition of St. Benedict and his followers. A space and place of warmth and acceptance. It is a place of quiet - away from the noise and hectic world around. It is a place where one is enveloped in Silence.

A few words about Silence:

As Sister Lisa Atkins, RSM (director of Hesychia) notes: It is important for retreatants to “realize that silence is not so much about simply ‘not talking’ but rather embracing the heart’s desire and intention to hear and listen to God.” (*Abbey Message*, Summer 2023, Vol. 79, No. 1) The sisters are available to help in deciphering God’s Voice.

Being still is not the same as doing nothing. In the silence one can begin to discern the voice of God speaking as he did to Elijah, or Jesus as he asked almost everyone he met/healed, “What is it you seek?” In order for that to occur, our eyes, ears, and heart must be opened.

Notice that Jesus pulled the deaf, blind mute man away from the crowd, then he healed him. (Mark 7:32-34). Sometimes, Jesus needs us to be away from that which distracts us in order for us to hear the quiet stirrings of God speaking in our hearts.

The first Mass was held at Hesychia on 19 of April in 1981. Sr. Louise Sharum, OSB, founder of the retreat ministry at Hesychia, recalls in her book *As the Morning Star Rises*, that the Communion Hymn that day was ‘Lose Yourself in Me’ (Carey Landry). Losing yourself in Jesus is precisely what all guests are invited to do during their stay. The name Hesychia is from the Greek meaning ‘stillness, rest, silence’. Henri Nouwen, renowned spiritual author, speaks of Hesychia in his book *The Way of the Heart*. He says, “Hesychia, the rest which flows from unceasing prayer, needs to be sought at all costs, even when its flesh is itchy, the world is alluring, and the demons noisy.” At Hesychia, one is given the chance to, in the words of Theophan the Recluse as quoted by Nouwen, “Descend with the mind into the heart and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all seeing, within you.”



Stepping into silence, into prayer, into simply sitting in the presence of the Lord can be daunting. Even for “seasoned” prayer practitioners, taking the time to settle into the silence sometimes requires a bit of effort. The environment of Hesychia can help settle a retreatant. Sitting on the porch of Mother Meinrada Hermitage, one can witness and be inspired by the example and rhythm of gentleness and loving devotion modeled by Sr. Anita DeSalvo, RSM as she prays her rosary while watering the flowers, or her dedication to details as she mows the lawn and cleans the hermitages for the next retreatant so that everything is pristine and welcoming. And Mike De Salvo’s care of the cows, grounds, and facilities add to the Benedictine hospitality. Sister Louise Sharum’s faithful prayerful presence before the Blessed Sacrament in chapel is hospitality displayed in quiet strength! It is simultaneous in its message of reassurance that every retreatant is being prayed for and an example of how to practice resting in the Lord’s presence and in silence. The handling of the practical day to day business of the ministry by Sister Lisa Atkins, RSM and her ability to capture the spirituality of the place through photos posted on FaceBook is not to be overlooked as an integral part of keeping the mission and ministry alive. Even the cows and Lil’ Scho add to the rhythm of Hesychia and aid in speaking to all that God is in his heaven and all will be well.

When the ‘settling in’ takes over, many find that in the stillness, the creativity welling within is able to emerge. They are then able to reflect that creativity back to others in joy, hope, and art in various forms. Psalm 126 says that “When the Divine Lover enters the human heart all yearnings are fulfilled.” It is an apt description of what occurs for many when they enter into the silence of Hesychia. It is what happened to St. Benedict in the cave at Sacro Speco. And from that revelation he was able to declare who and whose he was. Mother Catherine McAuley, foundress of the Religious Sisters of Mercy (RSM), understood this experience and encouraged her Sisters to “endeavor to know what are HIS (God’s) ways.” As you delve deeper into your spiritual journey, remember these words of St. Hildegard of Bingen, “Dare to declare who you are. It is not far from the shores of silence to the boundaries of speech. The path is not long, but the way is deep. You must not only walk there, you must be prepared to leap.” I invite you to allow Jesus to pull you away from the crowd and speak to you in the silence at the Benedictine Hermitages of Hesychia House of Prayer, New Blaine, Arkansas.



Phoro Credits: Lisa Atkins

Visit the gift shop for Hesychia House of Prayer merchandise! Bibles, books, rosaries, and other items are available during store hours. If you would like, you can also place an order by phone.



Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

9:30 AM - 3:30 PM

Saturday

12:30 PM - 3:00 PM

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To Tread the Labyrinth by Carly Flanagan



The golden sheen of icons, the illuminated windows of churches, and the faith of the religious kept the light of Christ burning during the medieval era. Many believers ventured to find places bathed in the light of Christ and the works of his followers; pilgrims journeyed to sacred places to connect with the stories they heard, and each pilgrim walked a tangible journey of faith. Most importantly, they longed to reach the Holy Land, the homeland of their savior. The pilgrimages to Jerusalem became impossible during the Crusades. It is believed by some scholars that this impossibility is directly related to the rise in popularity of the labyrinth. Labyrinths could be found in cathedrals and gardens because legend states that the pope, during this time, accepted labyrinths as a form of pilgrimage since the common folk could not journey to the Holy Land. What was it about labyrinths that could have earned this distinction?

When Dr. Dennis Siler, director of the Myles Friedman Honors Program at the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith, studied at Oxford University in England during his graduate school years, one line in a play set him on both a physical and spiritual discovery. While he re-read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Dr. Siler found the line: "...the quaint mazes in the wanton green/For lack of tread are indistinguishable." His curiosity grew, and he made inquiries. His tutor and a few other students spent a day driving around the English countryside in search of turf mazes. After hours of this fruitless hunt, they passed a farm, and Dr. Siler asked to stop. The tutor, actress, and professor Susan Hitch asked her students to stay in the car while she talked with the owners of the farm. When she returned, it was with permission to view the turf maze.

Turf mazes, labyrinths, in England are unique in that the soil of England has chalk under the layers, and once the chalk is unearthed, patterns can be created with the exposed chalk. This technique is part of a tradition in England that stretches back into history before Shakespeare penned *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Some turf mazes in the United Kingdom date to around 50 A.D. Labyrinths in England share similar names and features as

those found in Scandinavia, while cave paintings in Italy with the same shapes as these labyrinths trace back even further in human history. The mystery and spirituality of the labyrinth seems rooted in the psyche of humanity.

“To me, it’s a form of moving meditation,” said Dr. Siler. He explained that the labyrinth is “unicursal”, meaning it is one line, one movement from beginning to end, and as people move at different intervals and stages in the labyrinth, a weaving effect takes place. To Dr. Siler, the labyrinth is symbolic of life’s journey.

Dr. Siler, fascinated for years by labyrinths, discovered as he read more that there is yet another use for labyrinths. To illustrate it, he talked of the labyrinth in the cathedral of Chartre.

“The outer edges are referred to as ‘lunations’ because of their moonlike shapes. Those can be used as counters to calculate the date of Easter.”

On a small scale, the labyrinth connects people to the journey of their own soul, revealing mysteries. On a larger scale, the ability of a labyrinth to act as a calendar to Easter, to calculate the yearly journey of remembrance every Christian knows as the apex of human history, deepens the awesome and cosmic functions of these mystical creations.

In the symbolism of the labyrinth is the pilgrimage and the journey of discovery one takes. It is also the journey of humanity through the ages as they weave in and out of time, all part of the plan of God in His pursuit to bring us from the beginning to the end—from the Alpha and the Omega.

The Labyrinth of St. Scholastica Monastery

Sister Macrina Wiederkehr’s beloved labyrinth, tended now by Sister Barbara Bock and volunteers, calls sisters, retreatants, and area residents to experience the peace and stillness of treading its coils in meditation. Although the labyrinth is newer to the grounds than the grottoes and gardens, it connects to the history and mystery of labyrinths worldwide.

- Constructed in 2004, the labyrinth of St. Scholastica is modeled after the labyrinth in the cathedral of Chartre.
- Labyrinth architects Stuart and Mary Bartholomaeus of Knoxville, Tennessee, were commissioned to direct the construction of the St. Scholastica labyrinth. Volunteers from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia gathered to help construct the labyrinth.
- The generous donations of retreatants and Friends of the Center made the labyrinth on the grounds a reality.
- The St. Scholastica labyrinth is made from natural material of stones, wood chips, and pine needles.
- The labyrinth is located on the south side of the monastery grounds, and visitors may find a meditative brochure in a special water-proof box near the labyrinth entrance. The brochure is based on St. Theresa of Avila’s three-fold contemplative path: purgation, illumination, and union.



Retreatants tread the St. Scholastica Monastery labyrinth at a labyrinth walk.

News Briefs

August 1-2, 2023: Sisters Stephanie Schroeder, Barbara Bock, and Siena Fisk participated in the virtual Monastic Liturgy Forum.

August 6-12, 2023: Sister Kimberly Prohaska attended the Leadership Conference of Women Religious meeting in Dallas, Texas.

September 24-29, 2023: Sister Kimberly Prohaska and Ravi Thiagarajan attended the Resource Center for Religious Institutes conference in St. Louis, Missouri.

September 27-30, 2023: Sister Cecelia Brickell attended the Geriatrics and Long Term Care conference in Little Rock.

October 3-7, 2023: The monastery hosted the meeting of the Monastic Congregation of St. Gertrude Council.

November 4, 2023: Sisters Barbara Bock and Cecelia Brickell will attend a conference on Nutrition as Medicine in Little Rock

November 16-19, 2023: Sister Siena Fisk will attend the National Youth Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana.

My Fiat

*By Sister Maria Goretti DeAngeli,
OSB*

*I hear your call, oh God, though
dimmed*

By the noise deep within me.

I try to break through

The density of my being,

*To say my wholehearted YES to
sing with Mary,*

*MY BEING BLESS YOU, MY
GOD*

As I hear you,

*Call me to peace and justice, to
love and to hope.*

May my FIAT ring true to you.



St. Scholastica Monastery

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Oblate Program

Becoming an Oblate of St. Benedict is a commitment to draw closer in relationship to God. Every spiritual journey is unique. Our Benedictine Oblates share in the spiritual life, prayers, and good works of the community of St. Scholastica. They do not live in monastic communities, but live out Benedictine values in their daily lives while honoring God's presence in all people. They show love and concern for others.

Oblates of St. Scholastica meet after the 9:15 am Mass once a month for teaching and fellowship. Although we encourage Oblates to attend Mass with us and stay in person for our Oblate meeting, Zoom is an option for those unable to physically attend.

If you have an interest in our program, please email Oblate Director Sister Laura Cathcart for more information: oblates@stscho.org

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