

TIDINGS

Saint Bede Monastery and Center

A Newsletter from The Sisters of Saint Benedict
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Poem: Sister Dale Wollum, OSB
Illustration: Judy Bredeson



**Sister Margaret Michaud, OSB
Prioress**

TIDINGS

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MONASTIC MUSINGS

— Sister Margaret Michaud, OSB

The selections from Sacred Scripture that the Church puts before us in the Advent liturgy call for serious reflection. For example, from the Gospel of Mark we read on the First Sunday of Advent, "Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come." The time referred to here, of course, is the endtime, when the Lord will come in glory to judge the living and the dead. This is a time which no one can predict, and thus constant vigilance is needed. We must always be ready for the final accounting of our lives. This Advent reading, however, is also an imperative to pay attention, to keep focused, to know *what time it is now*. Mark's message urges us Christians to think about how our lives are going and how we are living out our baptismal dedication to Christ in the **present** reality of our days.

In today's busy world many of us get caught up in a seemingly ceaseless round of events, activities and responsibilities. There is little time to step back and notice the "big picture," to be aware of how our lives are in harmony with our values. We are on a journey to our final destination. We need to slow down and recognize the direction we are taking. The phrase "eternal rest" sounds so inviting when we are overwhelmed, worn out, burned out by the hectic pace we feel obliged to keep. Advent is a time to have a little of that rest here and now.

During Advent the spirit of the liturgy is thoughtful, contemplative, quietly waiting. Advent invites us to enter more deeply into our faith, to refocus our priorities. It is a perfect time for prayer, spiritual reading and meditation. In contrast, for many of us the days and weeks before Christmas, are filled with feverish activity: sending cards, buying gifts, baking and decorating.

The frenetic atmosphere can easily keep us from being aware of what Christmas is all about. The spirit of Advent provides a refreshing alternative to the typical holiday rush.

To be watchful, to be alert, to know what time it is, is our daily task. Advent is a time to renew our efforts in this direction. We must ask ourselves if we have our priorities well in order. Do our lives give evidence of our faith in Christ? Do the activities of our days reflect that the search for truth, justice, love and peace is our fundamental quest? Is our "now" a time of grace and spiritual renewal? These questions need pondering. May Advent be our special time to consider them.

Madonna of the Poor — Sister Judy Kramer, OSB

The children rushed to tell their parents that some strange doctors and nurses were in their village of Cortebamba Monjor. This tiny settlement high in the Andes some four hours up the rugged mountains from Quenca (Ecuador) was the site of our Saturday free clinic.

This young mother did not go to the school where we had set up some simple examination rooms. She sat on the grass with other women of the village as they giggled and quietly visited, I suppose, about home and cooking and children and how strange these visiting North Americans were! She accepted an envelope of vitamins that we gave her for her child -- but who knows if they were ever used. She manifested a certain pride and self-sufficiency which indicated no interest in changing her ways. She wore the famous native hat made from locally grown grasses and her fully ruffled black skirt made a tent around her.

Her child was not held in her arms but, securely fastened to her back in a wooly shawl which mother and child shared. The child moved about easily and reacted to us from the perch on his mother's back.

The people of this isolated village in Ecuador live so differently than we do and it was the privilege of our team with Doctors Without Borders to meet some of them last February. The goodness and graciousness of their simple lives brings into focus the theme of Emmanuel -- God with us -- God among the peoples wherever they are.

Christmas is a contented noble mother, rooted in her people and customs -- a woman who knows the sacredness and goodness of life and who chooses to share her child with all the world.



Sister Judy Kramer and Ecuadorian client

REACHING OUT

— Sister Dale Wollum, OSB

- ❑ **Sister Monica Mai** in late September shared ideas for giving grief support with tenants of the Good Shepherd and Eastridge apartments with a presentation titled "Being Friend, Being Neighbor in Time of Illness and Loss." Her audiences, Sister Monica noted, "were delightful, caring people who truly are friends and neighbors to one another in life's journey."
- ❑ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Campus Ministry again sponsored a "Busy Student Retreat" in November. Saint Bede members again served as mentors and friends with students on a one-to-one basis. Participating sisters included **Sister Judy Kramer**, **Sister Margaret Michaud**, **Sister Karen Streveler**, **Sister Dale Wollum** and **Sister Mary Frances Gebhard**.



Sister Monica Mai



Sister Mary Frances Gebhard (third from left)



Sister Catherine Manning

- ❑ **Sister Catherine Manning** and **Sister Mary Francis Gebhard** attended the Annual Assembly of the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice in Watertown, Wis. Other Justice and Peace activities: **Sister Margaret Michaud**, **Sister Dale Wollum** and **Sister Mary Frances Gebhard** participated in an ecumenical Peace prayer service held on the Peace Lutheran Church grounds in Eau Claire. A peace rally, held at the Capitol grounds in Madison in October drew thousands of participants, including **Fr. Thomas Krieg**, chaplain of Saint Bede Monastery, and **Sister Mary Frances Gebhard**, coordinator of the monastery's Justice and Peace ministry.

- ❑ In late summer **Sister Catherine Manning** spoke on "Domestic Violence and the Family" at the board meeting of the La Crosse Diocesan Council of Catholic Women at Tomah, Wis.

- ❑ **Sister Roslyn Tsai**, who twice was a visiting sister here, touched bases in September with a note and photo from her home, St. Benedict Monastery in Taiwan, R.O.C. Known for her paper-cutting artwork, Sister Roslyn, shown harvesting mulberries, called Saint Bede a "good model for me to follow. I miss you a lot," she wrote the sisters. "I think we need some of (your) elders in our community for us to learn from them."



Sister Rosalyn Tsai

Days at St. Benedict's Boys School Brought Mostly Smiles for Hurtgen Brothers

For James Hurtgen and his older brother Peter, memories of the former St. Benedict Boys School in Altoona, evoke bitter-sweet memories. The school, housed in an old railroad hotel, suddenly became their world during 1950-51 after their father, a dentist, died in 1947 and their mother was forced to board her sons to cope economically in Madison with a daughter, Judy.

In a letter this summer to **Sister Roma Paulus**, a teacher and principal at the school after the boys had rejoined their family, James Hurtgen shared some recollections of St. Benedict's.

"We (James, age 4, Peter, 9) were cared for by a **Sister Althea (Moore)**, who I remember as a very small woman, not much bigger than I, he wrote. "I thought she dressed strangely."

Hurtgen then shared some glimpses of recalled daily life -- meals at tables of six boys presided over by a nun, "whose job, like the Irish monks of centuries ago, was to preserve civilization until the dark ages of our ungoverned childhoods passed. When one of us misbehaved -- crossed a line -- we were required to eat our dinners standing. I remember eating meals at a table governed by a large woman. I do not recall ever misbehaving."

Before the pupil age was capped at 14, boarders as old as 16 were accepted. Many of the boys came from big cities and minority backgrounds. Nearly all came from difficult circumstances and the sisters, with no special training, struggled to

blend a curriculum of studies, religious training, recreation and other activities with both firmness and concern for each student's needs. Sister Roma estimated that more than a dozen past and present Saint Bede sisters served as teachers, prefects, cooks and in other roles. Laymen conducted the twice-week military drills or coached a highly regarded athletics program.

"You could compare St. Benedict's a little bit to Boy's Town," Sister Roma said. "The sisters tried to help pupils from homes where one or the other parent had died. They needed extra care and help with lessons. Or if the child had a good start from his parents, we'd encourage him to keep up with his studies. We tried to develop the child the best way we could and understood what our goals were."

In his letter, Hurtgen recalled the school's Saturday night movies, especially those starring comics Laurel & Hardy and Abbot & Costello. "How many times were you (Sister Roma and the other Benedictines) required to endure those films? Serious misbehavior meant no Saturday film," he wrote. "A boy would have to be very short-sighted to cheat himself out of the Saturday films."

Caster oil lubricated the lives of the school boys. "I do not know if caster oil was a daily regimen or was administered only when you nuns divined that it was required," Hurtgen recalled, adding his theory that caster oil today is known to kill grubs in lawns and "thus discouraging moles from coming around. We had everything, so we probably had grubs."

JoAnn Moran, of the Saint Bede housekeeping staff, was 19 when she first served as a teacher and prefect at St. Benedict's. She recalls that "conditions were a little primitive."

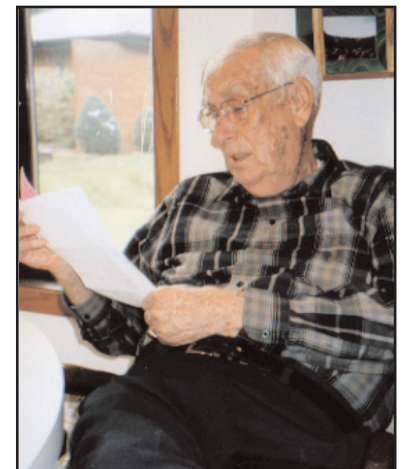
For young Jim Hurtgen, sleeping arrangements at the school still triggers vivid memories. "I remember ... a large dormitory room of many beds," he wrote. "White beds, Metal. Now here is a scary one: I imagined that one of the sisters was posted all night long at the door of the room. Watching over us delin-

-Sisters at Former St. Mary's Academy Made Exception for Boarding Brothers

Walter Ryberg, retired executive and board member of National Presto Industries in Eau Claire, keeps a warm place in his heart for the Benedictines. His father died in Minneapolis in 1929, causing his mother to take a traveling sales job and find a boarding school for sons Walter, about 11, and John, 8.

"She had been born in Eau Claire and was able to persuade the sisters at St. Mary's Academy, a girl's boarding school, to accept my brother and me," said Ryberg, who will soon celebrate his 85th birthday. "It was during the Depression and Mom told the sisters, "If I can't keep a job, I can't support them."

The academy's superior, **Sister Brasilia Cosgrove**, relented and found twin beds and a room



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Walter Ryberg

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quents. Keeping the peace. The shadows cast on the wall near the door convinced me that a human form was outlined there. Watchful. Unspeaking. This is the moment of the day I worked hardest to be good. 'Lord, let me be invisible.'"

Typically, the circumstances that brought boarders to Saint Benedict's were painful. Through the years, however, news of the successes and gratitude of former students has reached the sisters. The school counts five priests among its alumni. Both Hurtgen boys attended Georgetown University as undergraduates, with Peter earning a law degree. Today he is chairman of the National Labor Relations Board.

Jim, who later earned a doctorate in political science at State University of New York at Buffalo, last spring celebrated 31 years on the faculty of SUNY -- Fredonia.

I hope we boys have given you cause to be proud and joyful," Jim said in his letter to Sister Roma. "There has never been a day in my life -- I thank God -- that I have not been happy to live. I pray that you can say the same. I pray that you can say on behalf of all the dear women who cared for us, 'Thank you Lord for sending those monsters to us.'"



Winter scene at St. Benedict's Boys School, circa 1949-50. Peter, in checkered hat, is in second row on the right; he's looking at brother James, in lap of boy, fourth from right.

The Journey of Sister Britta — Joann Moran

On a blustery day in late December, joy and warmth filled the home of an Irish family in Starkweather, N.D. with the birth of a baby girl who would one day be known to us as **Sister Britta Coyne**.

Nurtured by parents who were deeply religious professional people, it is not surprising that Sister speaks of her childhood as being happy. She remembers homey events such as routine evening story time with her mother and father reading to the Coyne children. This early aptitude and interest in literature is reflected in a life time of willingness to recite lengthy sections of poetry for the enjoyment of others.

By her teenage years, Sister Britta entered St. Benedict's Convent at St. Joseph, Minn. Later she earned her B. A. in Education from the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul. When new religious foundations were established from St. Benedict's in 1948 Sister Britta was a young nun already teaching at St. Patrick's in Eau Claire. She stayed on, becoming a member in the newly established Saint Bede Priory.

Sister also recalled her earlier teaching experiences at St. Patrick's -- the beginning of a school term with an expected 57 first graders and the reality of 84 eager, vibrant youngsters showing up for the first day of class.

"The classroom was short of desks, chairs and just about everything else," Sister Britta said. "All the reading chairs were occupied and the rest of the children were sitting on top of tables." Her solution, she recalled, was a hurried call to St. Benedict's for a second sister to share the teaching load.

Sister Britta also earned a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. Later she added certifications in library and school administration from UW-River Falls and credentials in gerontology from St. Mary's of the Woods in Indiana.

Sister Britta still delights in memories of teaching and serving as principal, especially her last post at St. Francis School in Ellsworth, Wis. But leaving teaching ended only one of her careers -- not her many services to the Saint Bede community.

Sister also served the elderly and infirm sisters at Lakeside Nursing and Rehabilitation at Chippewa Falls and later at their Clairemont home, where she now resides.

At Sister Britta's 50th Jubilee, the following excerpt from the poem, "The Clown," written by **Sister Ruth Feeney**, honored the Irish wit, wisdom and persona of a favorite Benedictine.

**"There are no pretenses with this comic friend
Being transparent is the clown's vital vocation.
What you see is what you get,
A soul painted on a face...
Clowns stand in for the rest of us
and risk being fully free.
Surely they symbolize
Integrity at its best."**



Sister Britta Coyne

BY THE LIBRARY LAMP

— Sister Lorayne Andre, OSB

Where in Packerland -- except at Saint Bede Center -- could you imagine hearing a dialogue on a Sunday afternoon in September among readers of the mystics, contemporary theologians or fiction writers of our time?

"CATHOLIC SOUP FOR THE SOUL," a book discussion group sponsored by the Center, had its origin two years ago. Anita Haller, librarian at the Menomonie Public Library, in conversation with Sister Margaret Michaud, Saint Bede prioress, expressed her desire to meet people interested in sharing talk about books -- especially on spiritual topics. A book-talk group seemed the answer and "Catholic Soup" was born. It had natural home at the Center, including a lounge for a comfortable meeting place and a library for needed resources.

Initial members besides Anita and Sister Margaret included Sister Hildegard Geraets and Father Tom Krieg, while others belong at present are Brigid Geroux, Ken Ripp, Kaia Simon and Julie Bendel. Anita returned to her native Ohio last year.

Participants have the common satisfaction of sharing reflections and reactions to spiritual books, both classical and current. Sister Margaret also sees their function here as fitting into the apostolic mission of the Center. Brigid Geroux, when asked why she joined the reading club, said it stimulated her to encounter books of this type, knowing she could discuss them with others and be challenged by the open exchange of ideas.

Books the group have reviewed cover a wide spectrum, from Thomas Merton excerpts to Ronald Rolheiser's **The Holy Longing**, and **Silence** by Shusaku Endo, the Japanese novelist. **Traveling Mercies** was a favorite of the group, and



Book Club - from left, Fr. Thomas Krieg, Sister Margaret, Sister Hildegard and Brigid Geroux.

Galileo's Daughter was a popular selection.

The September meeting focused on **The Strangest Way** by Robert Barron, a theology professor at Mundelein College, outside Chicago. The group's analysis explored the significance of the title and the author's liberal use of literary allusions. Sections referring to Catholic practices were critically examined. Sister Hildegard pointed out the importance of modeling Christianity, while Father Tom emphasized the challenge of "carry the middle road" between mystery and rationalism.

You are welcome to add your thoughts and views to the spiritual soup of the day -- to commune with other readers on topics Catholic, stimulating and artistic. Lively or measured, these sociable exchanges of insights and opinions are food for the mind and the spirit.

Sisters at Former St. Mary's Academy Made Exception for Boarding Brothers

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and bath for the boys in the two-story laundry behind the academy where the girls lived and the boys also took classes. "We also took meals in the building with old Pete, the janitor, and a fellow who lived downtown named Francis who the sisters helped out," Ryberg said.

Because both boys were skinny (Ryberg said even at age 19 he was 6'2" tall but weighed only about 129 pounds), the sisters were determined to "put meat on our bones."

"One sister saw that we got special milkshakes and Sister Brasilia recognized that boys needed to be treated as boys with more play outside in the fresh air. We felt lonely at first, since we couldn't use the academy grounds but eventually we met and played with boys in the neighborhood." Still vivid in his

memory is Sister Brasilia's consternation when young Walter went missing and she belatedly learned he had camped overnight with a friend in a downtown backyard.

"She was a brilliant gal -- tough, but she had a heart," Ryberg said, adding that all the Benedictines looked out for the two boys. "The sisters were darn good teachers."

After a few years at the academy, Walter finished high school at the former St. Patrick's and the family moved to Syracuse, New York, where Mrs. Ryberg's job had taken her. Walter said John died about 15 years ago after a career as a U.S. Navy carrier pilot and a brief stint in sales for the former National Pressure Cooker. That connection lured Walter from an East Coast management post to the same firm, known today as National Presto.

Walter and his wife Patricia have three sons, two daughters and, he estimated, "at least" 15 grandchildren and great grandchildren.

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Developments

— James A. Schwartz, Director of Development

As Christmas nears and thoughts turn to blessings counted, given and anticipated, we sometimes forget that great outcomes often start with prayer, creative thinking and financial planning.

Charitable giving before year's end, for example, can make a difference to the special people and organizations you treasure and to your finances at tax time. Before January 1, 2003, donors can boost their tax deductions by making gifts of appreciated assets -- stocks, bonds and mutual funds -- to qualified non-profit religious and other organizations.

Recently, a couple, decided to transfer some proceeds from a mutual fund to Saint Bede, using the transfer form supplied by their investment firm. The transaction was simple and straight-forward. The benefits were many -- a generous gift for the monastery's operations and a tax deduction for the donors.

Even stocks that have declined in value can have a sunny side at tax time. In this case, the donor first sells the shares, then contributes the proceeds to a qualifying organization. Capital losses accruing from the sale of the shares may be used to offset capital gains from other investments. They also may qualify as charitable deductions.

Charitable giving remains one of the most effective ways to perpetuate donor values and ease tax burdens. For example, you can:

- Donate appreciated securities and other properties for deductions of up to 30 percent of Adjusted Gross Income (AGI). Contributions in excess of this year's allowable deductions can be carried over for five years.
- Donations of cash are deductible to 50 percent of AGI.
- Donors can "double up" on their charitable deductions by prepaying 2003 gifts in late 2002. To maximize these benefits for the current tax year, however, gifts must be made prior to January 1, 2003.

Charitable giving plans, especially those involving your estate, should be discussed with, for example, a spouse or other key beneficiaries. It's also wise to seek the advice of a qualified attorney, accountant or financial planner. Contact the Development Office (715-834-7130) for information about giving opportunities, wills, and income-providing gifts such as charitable remainder trusts and charitable lead trusts. Or request a copy of our "Varieties of Gifts" booklet.

May the blessings of the Christmas Season and New Year brighten your days.

Briefly...

- Planning continues for the Celebrity Banquet - **Dinner Beyond the Hill**, set for Saturday, Feb. 15, at Park Inn & Suites, Eau Claire. Table (\$300) and Event (\$500) sponsorships are available. Donations of auction items for auction also are welcome.
- Ideas and suggestions are invited for an all-class **reunion of Saint Bede Academy alumni and staff**. The event, planned for July 2003, will mark the 40th year of the establishment of the former high school, which closed in 1978. Please call **Mary Traynor** at the Center, 715-834-8642, if you can help organize the event or have suggestions or questions.
- Regis alumnus **Jim Ryder's** Nov. 9 slide presentation on his solo Canadian Arctic dog sledding adventures drew 85 persons to Saint Bede Center. The two-hour event, hosted by the sisters, featured Greenland huskies and displays of gear from Ryder's sled runs covering more than 1,000 miles.
- Wish List** - Digital camera, lenses and related equipment for **Sister Karen Streveler, Sister Ruth Feeney** and other sisters to illustrate brochures, posters, displays and for web site updates. Cost: \$2,150. Please call the Development Office at 715-834-7130 if you can help.

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UPCOMING CENTER EVENTS

As an ecumenical retreat and conference site, Saint Bede Center welcomes church, civic and service groups to use the facilities for retreats, seminars and workshops. In addition, the Center offers a variety of religious, spiritual, cultural and educational programs. Private retreatants are always welcome as well!

December 13-14 - Advent/Christmas Retreat-Gifting.- *The Gift of Spiritual Renewal and Self-Care*
- directed by Mary Rose Remington, Inver Grove Heights, MN

December 17-January 2 - Labyrinth available for meditative walking

January 9 - Spirit of Living Network

January 25 - Diocesan School of Biblical Studies

January 28 - *Women on the Row: Human Rights Issues*
- presentation by Kathleen O'Shea

February 1 - *Centering Prayer* - Introductory workshop
- presented by Sister Virginia Matter, OSB and Peter Hable

February 7-8 - Lay Ministry weekend, Diocese of La Crosse

February 14-16 - Marriage Encounter weekend

February 20 - Spirit of Living Network

February 22 - Diocesan School of Biblical Studies

Catholic Soup for the Soul book discussion group meets monthly at the Center. If interested, call for date and time.

For more information about these events, please call

SAINT BEDE CENTER - (715) 834-8642



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WINTER 2002

CENTERING

– Sister Hildegard Geraets, OSB

"There is an appointed time for every thing, and a time for every affair under the heavens. -Ecclesiastes 3:1

How often we needed to remind ourselves at Saint Bede Center that time was a gift, a gift to be shared with others. Some weeks we hosted over 400 people -- people from Sacred Heart Hospital, Luther-Midelfort Clinic, Logicare, the Eau Claire Public Schools, Chippewa Valley Technical College, Diocesan organizations and smaller groups from area churches.

We had to look for time and remind ourselves that everything is made appropriate to its time. Keeping this concept in mind along with knowing we want to share our Benedictine hospitality with others helped us earn some interesting comments from those using the facilities. Paraphrased, their remarks car-

ried these messages: We continue to like to come to the Center because of the quiet atmosphere; the warm hospitality makes us feel at home; the peace and serenity within the building nurtures a sense of sacredness; to be able to walk in the woods and reflect with nature helps develop a feeling of calmness which so often gets lost in the busy world. A time for quiet; a time for reflection

If we follow the Liturgical Year we see the Church has wisely built in this time with the season of Advent. Advent: a time for waiting, a time for reflection, a time to come closer to God. To find such time is a challenge, especially while preparing for the Christmas season. If you would like help in finding such time, please contact us at 715-834-8642 to schedule time to seek renewal of the spirit, mind and body through reflection and a variety of programs.

May your Advent season be filled with peace, joy and a closeness to the Savior.

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