FROM THE PRIORESS’S DESK

“But whence do I perceive the goodness of the Ocean, as it appeared in the eyes of the Creator? If the Ocean is good and worthy of praise before God, how much more beautiful is the assembly of a Church like this, where the voices of men, of children, and of women, arise in our prayers to God mingling and resounding like the waves which beat upon the shore. This Church also enjoys a profound calm, and malicious spirits cannot trouble it with the breath of heresy. Deserve, then, the approbation of the Lord by remaining faithful to such good guidance, in our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory and power for ever and ever. Amen.”

- From the 4th Homily Upon the gathering together of the waters

When this letter comes to you, it is summer time in the Northern Hemisphere – a time for vacation, of picnics and outings on lakes, rivers and oceans. Do I perceive the goodness of the Ocean, and nature as it appears in the eyes of the Creator, Basil asks? Do I praise and thank the Creator for all the goodness and beauty of our creation? I’m almost sure that St. Basil the Great inspired St. Benedict with the picture that our voices mingle and resound like the waves which beat upon the shore. In RB 19 Benedict wants us to be aware of the divine presence everywhere and that our minds are in harmony with our voices.

All the solemnities of Easter and post Easter time are over. All over the world our Sisters’ voices mingled and resounded like waves which beat upon the shore. As we continue in Ordinary Time, let us always think about God, God’s works, blessings and gifts given to us. God, the Creator, and God’s saving help are to be praised in the liturgy. Holzherr in his commentary to RB 19 writes, “In prayer, one has eyes only for God, whose gaze rests on each one”.

From the beauty of Nebraska, the rolling hills and the spacious corn fields, we wish you abundant blessings as you read our news,

Sr. Pia Portmann, OSB

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ADVENTURES IN WINNEBAGO

By Postulants Laura Haschke and Elizabeth Haag

The two postulants from the Norfolk Priory had the opportunity to have their month of exposure with the Sisters in Winnebago. Postulant Laura went for the month of April and Postulant Elizabeth for the month of May. Their time in Winnebago was filled with awe and wonder as they discovered a new culture and the rich traditions of the Winnebago tribe.

During Postulant Laura’s stay, she was invited, with the sisters to lead a rosary at two funerals. One of the parishioners who she befriended helped her understand all the culturally rich traditions that go into the process of funerals. Some of which would include, the four day wake. Four is a special number to the Ho-chunk (Winnebago) people because it stands for the four seasons, four cardinal directions and the four hills of life; birth, young adult, elderly, and death. The meal at the funeral is only eaten with spoons because sharp utensils upset the spirits. This makes it very interesting and challenging for newcomers trying to eat their food gracefully. On the fourth day when the funeral takes place they have the coffin carried to the church followed by a procession of people while the traditional drums are played and men sing in Ho-chunk. When the coffin is finally put into the ground, one by one, the family and friends walk by the coffin and with their left hand grab a handful of dirt and toss it onto the coffin and walk away. They are not allowed to look back. It gave her a chance to see firsthand how these people care for each other, how they treat death, and especially how they treat life.

During Postulant Elizabeth’s time, she experienced a different aspect of the Ho-Chunk culture. Her time in Winnebago showed how crucial it is as a missionary to know the language and culture of the native people. In the history of the Winnebago tribe, there was a period where the Ho-Chunk language was outlawed by the United States government. The effect of this decision is still seen today, as only a handful of the Natives from the tribe speak it fluently. It is the Tribes current goal to teach the children of the Winnebago tribe the Ho-Chunk language so that they might have a better understanding of their culture.

Their time in Winnebago was also filled with working in St. Augustine school every morning to gain experience of teaching. Postulant Laura first worked in the library with Sr. Francis where she helped with everyday maintenance, and chess club. She also worked with the kindergarteners, first, second, third, and fourth graders. Postulant Elizabeth worked with the sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.

Both postulants enjoyed their experience working with the people, in the school, and with the sisters. It gave them an opportunity to live in a small in community and learn more about the sisters and their lives.

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OUR NEIGHBORS: Working with Burmese Immigrants

By Sr. Michael Marie, OSB

During the Season of Lent Srs. Lumen and Inviolata approached the Spirituality Center to invite a person or persons to speak to the community and public at large on the topic of challenges faced by Immigrants adjusting into the American Culture. This was to help sensitize attendees to the challenges which many of these immigrants face on a daily basis.

Ultimately this facing of injustices and sufferings of these people was to bring to our awareness ways in which the Suffering Christ is still with us in so many ways. And also to prepare us to enter more deeply into the Stations of the Cross which they were preparing for the last Friday of Lent in which they depicted various injustices still with us in our modern world.

One continuing result of the presentation by three different minority representatives was that we learned of a significant ethnic group of Burmese immigrants living in the Norfolk area. We heard of their trials of children struggling in one of the local Primary Schools. The challenge with the parents not understanding the language and needing to approve the work of the child. And also, the parent could not assist the child with homework. Learning of this situation some sisters have volunteered to tutor 5 of the children following their June summer school classes at the school. Therefore, every Monday and Wednesday the children come from the school a short distance from the Monastery and spend an additional hour of concentrated study on reading, comprehension spelling and math. Sr. Andrea, Sr. Celine, Sr. Jania, Sr. Lumen and Oblate
Carol all give their best to helping these eager students to improve their language and math skills. We are grateful to have this opportunity to help even in this small way.

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SPRING 2017 AT THE INDIAN MISSION

By Sr. Frances, OSB

Most of this time we were five sisters serving God and the people at St. Augustine Mission on the Winnebago Indian Reservation. Lent came to a glorious culmination with the Easter celebration, the first for Father Mark Beran and the last one for Father Dan Wittrock. Our organist was in the last stage of her first pregnancy and could not fulfill all her traditional services, but with the generous help of Sister Rita Marie at the keyboard we all praised God joyfully the best way we could.

Soon the school year was winding down and with the graduation of eight students from eighth grade on May 17, there were only the traditional end-of-year activities like staff meetings, reports, initial planning for the coming school year, and then the big “house-cleaning” that included shampooing of all the carpeted classrooms and hallways to get ready for the various service groups who come mostly from within the Archdiocese of Omaha and surroundings, but also as far away as New Hampshire and San Diego. Sr. Madeleine departed for her own summer activities after completing her first full year at Bishop Heelan High School faculty member in Sioux City on May 26.

The great abundance of rain easily turned our minds in another direction. What used to be a hobby for Sr. Frances in the past four years soon occupied the minds and energies of the whole community of four after the regular day’s work, namely creating a garden plot for each of us out of a piece of wilderness. How good to have the enthusiastic help of our two young postulants. Maybe their vocation was tested by the additional strain on many an evening: dig, pull, clean the tools, etc. till sundown. It seems like they gladly took in stride this aspect of their formative experience at the one and only mission station of the priory at this time. One month exposure for Laura, then for Elizabeth were truly also a precious gift for us in the community. In a few more weeks we can invite them to a garden fest to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The rabbits, squirrels and birds enjoyed these ‘fruits’ immediately, to such an extent that we decided to fence in the whole enterprise. And now, since the rains stopped, watering the precious plants is the reason for our continued ‘evening exercise’. But one more challenge was suddenly here: how to get ahead of the small critters like aphids, caterpillars and mildew that show great interest in the tender greens. We are still at it, also learning from experiences shared by seasoned gardeners on YouTube. – Wishing you many joys and blessings this summer

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American Benedictine Formation Conference SYMPOSIUM

By Sr. Gabrielle Marie Oestreich, OSB
The American Benedictine Formation Conference (ABFC) held its bi-annual symposium at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana from May 1-4, 2017. Sr. Pia Portmann (Prioress) and Sr. Gabrielle Marie Oestreich (Novice Directress) attended. The theme “Transformation: Openness to Living our Monastic Life Faithfully” was enhanced by exceptional liturgies with the monastic community, lively conversations with all the participants and in particular by the two keynote speakers who captivated the participants with timely insights for formation of our new members.

Sr. Lynn Levo, CSJ, an experienced consulting psychologist, presented a day focused on, “Fostering a Transforming Presence”. She stressed the need for those working in formation to view the work of journeying with our new members as “accompaniment”, rather than “forming them into a mold”. Such a relationship involves listening, witnessing and offering of specific, flexible and strategic support.

Sr. Jane Becker, OSB from Immaculate Conception Monastery, Ferdinand Indiana, challenged the participants on the second day with the workshop: “Know When to Fold”, a topic to address the difficult personalities in formation, recognizing the “red flags” of personality disorders which prohibit successful community living, and the difficult aspects of asking the individual to leave community. Identifying the realities of obstacles among the professed sisters to make such difficult decisions, Sr. Jane encouraged formators and community leaders to identify, evaluate and ask the individual to leave early in the long formation process as a matter of justice for the individual and the community. Many helpful guidelines were provided for decision making and for ultimately saying “no” and “goodbye”.

The symposium included the business meeting for the ABFC for review of policies and procedures, financial reports, and the election of new members to the ABFC Core team. The entire symposium provided a wonderful opportunity to connect with other Benedictine formators and strengthen our knowledge as formators.

READING OUR DREAMS WORKSHOP

By Novice Sarah McMahon

Formation in Norfolk hosted a Dream Workshop May 9-10, 2017. The guest speakers leading the workshop were Sr. Jeanne Ranek, OSB from Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, SD, and Sr. Emily Meisel, OSB from Mother of God Monastery in Watertown, SD. The purpose of the workshop was to record it for future use in the T4 program.

Participants included Postulant Jennifer and Directress Sr. Marcia from Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, KS; Junior Sister Barbara from Watertown, SD; Novice Terry, Junior Sister Peggy and Directress Sr. Sharon Ann from Yankton, SD; Sister Janet on sabbatical from Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck, ND; and the Postulants Laura and Elizabeth, Novice Sarah and Directress Sr. Gabrielle Marie from our own monastery here in Norfolk.

The workshop was entitled "Dream Work on the Spiritual Journey” and covered a variety of methods used in dream work. Our dreams can offer a channel for God to speak to us if we pay attention to the highly symbolic language of our dreams. Often dream interpretation is like our Lectio Divina process in which we have to sit with the word (or the dream in this case) to allow its meaning to unfold for us. Many symbols do have a common meaning but often each symbol in our dreams holds a unique meaning for each of us and the emotion in the dream can also contribute to the meaning(s) found within it. The workshop led us to dreams within Scripture and the meanings therein as well as looking at several example dreams and using the processes we had learned about to prod out a meaning or two for each dream. Ultimately the workshop pointed us toward paying attention to our dreams and using them as a possible means of growth both emotionally and spiritually. The participants were able to bond during recreational time outside of the workshop.

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MAKE A JOYFUL NOISE – A RECITAL BY NOVICE SARAH
On the evening of Sunday, May 28, 2017, I (Novice Sarah) held a recital in the chapel of Immaculata Monastery as the culmination of my year of studying organ with Karl Henkel. Karl's family and Virginia Maas as well as a couple of our brothers from Schuyler joined the Sisters to listen to a variety of music. I played several organ solos from various composers and time periods. As May is a Marian month, I played several Marian themed pieces including Maria Zart ("Gentle Mary"), a chant Ave Maria in which I accompanied my own voice, and a Swahili Marian Antiphon Tunakimbilia Ulinzi Wako in which I accompanied Sr. Inviolata and myself. The recital concluded with Karl Henkel accompanying me on the organ for the piece Adagio from Concerto for Clarinet, K.622 by Mozart. The evening concluded with all present joining in Compline.

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VOCATION MINISTRY ROUND-UP

By Sr. Inviolata Mukhaabi, OSB

NRVC Heartland Member Area Meeting

The month of April started off busy for the Vocation ministry. The National Religious Vocations Conference held into regional meeting for the Vocation Directors in the Heartland Member Area at St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska from April 3-5, 2017. This meeting brought together 18 vocation directors from 14 different congregations (some communities had 2 members present).

The theme for this gathering was “Effective Collaboration between Campus Ministry and Vocation Ministry.” To that effect we had as speakers a group of FOCUS Missionaries from the University of Nebraska in Omaha (UNO) talking about their experience dealing with students on college campuses, and how ties in with promoting vocations to religious life and the priesthood. FOCUS Missionaries are engaged in leading bible studies on college/university campus and forming disciples on campus.

The other set of speakers were 2 Benedictine Sisters from Sacred Heart Monastery in Yankton, SD. Sr. Marybeth has been involved in both Vocation ministry and campus ministry in her community for a very long time. She shared with us her practices of working effectively with vocation ministry if you are the campus minister and vice-versa. She was assisted in this presentation by her community member, Sr. Clarice Korger, the Vocation Director. Even though the second day was all class work, we had time to socialize and just have a good time getting to know the other participants. Monday night was a welcome social with snacks. Tuesday evening was dinner out and since most of them were coming from outside of Nebraska, we took them to a local restaurant so they can have a taste of local Nebraska taste and feel. It was a wonderful time.

I am grateful for having a chance to meet and get to know these amazing servants of the Lord in the Vocation Ministry. It is always encouraging to know that problems in vocation ministry are not unique to a particular community or congregation. They are common, and networking helps what the others are doing and how they are doing it. We are never lone rangers in the vineyard of
the Lord. We work towards the same goal: bringing others to God.

**Teresa Blubaugh Becomes Affiliate**

Once more it is pure joy as I reflect on the incredible ways that God has used me to introduce the Missionary Benedictine life to the young women here in the USA. I believe it is totally God’s doing. I have had the joy of getting to know Teresa Blubaugh, the amazing young woman that she is, and journeying with her through her discernment with us.

On May 21st, she became an affiliate, marking an important step towards joining our community. Teresa is from Omaha area, thus a ‘home girl’ so to speak. May God continue to bless her as she makes the final preparation of entering the monastery, most probably January next year 2018. Thank you to all the prayers that make my work so easy. May God continue blessing us with good vocations.

**Summer Camps 2017**

As I finish off this newsletter, we are getting ready for a series summer camps. June 24-28, Sr. Rita Marie, Sr. Celine, and Sr. Fidelis Marie are representing the community at a vocation camp in the Diocese of Savannah, Georgia. They will be giving all the talks at this camp, specifically about vocations. More about this camp will be included in the next newsletter. July 1-15, Sr. Jane and Sr. Inviolata will be at the Lifeteen summer camps in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, Georgia. At these camps, Lifeteen wants the presence of religious Sisters as a witness to the beauty of religious life. We will have more than 250 high school students and 100 college students every week. July 31-August 5, Sr. Celine and Sr. Fidelis Marie will be representing the community at another Lifeteen summer camp in Georgia. Please keep all our Sisters, the speakers and the young people in your prayers. More about these camps will be included in the next newsletter.

That in all things God may be glorified!

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**BISHOP HEELAN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC MISSION TRIP 2017**

By Sr. Madeleine Miller, OSB

Early on Sunday morning, June 4th, Father Patrick and I took off from Omaha with 14 of our Bishop Heelan students to serve for a week at an orphanage in the Dominican Republic. None of us knew exactly what to expect, but trusted that God would do incredible things in and through our students during the trip. Miraculously we got everyone on the 4 am airport shuttle, and got in the air safely after Father said a blessing for our trip.

Once we arrived in the thatched-roof airport in Punta Cana, our Dominican adventure began. As we drove to the orphanage, we left behind the area for tourists and traveled into the poorer villages. For six of our students, this was their first time leaving the US, and everything was very eye-opening for them in a unique way. As we all left behind our comfort zone, we learned anew that true joy comes from our faith, family, community and generosity rather than in material comfort. After pulling in to the orphanage compound, the staff, volunteers and children welcomed us with open arms. The kids never stopped smiling, hugging us, or asking to take selfies. It’s amazing that small children halfway around the world can use our cell phones better than we can! Even though we were only there a short time, everyone showed us great love and welcome.
Throughout the week, our group started the day with Holy Mass. In the mornings we helped construct a new agricultural education building for the school and continued work on a new fence for the boys' houses. At this orphanage called Nuestros Pequenos Hermanos (NPH), the children live in family-size groups with "tías" who care for them. They all go to school together, and many go on to university. The graduates all spend a year giving service back to their NPH family, and all say how profound a difference NPH has made in their lives. Our students loved spending afternoons playing with the children throughout the week as well. We had prayer time and talks in the evenings, as well as Adoration with Confession on Wednesday. On Tuesday night we traveled to nearby San Pedro to have Mass in the Cathedral with the bishop who changed his plans so he could celebrate Mass for us and welcome us. Then on Friday, we enjoyed an outing to a nearby beach before leaving for the US on Saturday.

Our students had many opportunities to learn about missionary life throughout our trip. They found a giant tarantula in their cabin late one night, and came to appreciate cold showers after sweating in the heat during work time. Despite the many challenges, our students wanted to stay or bring the orphanage children home with us as we left Saturday. As Father Patrick said in his closing homily, when it is hard to leave it means we have loved, and that is always God's gift and a blessing.

We hope to continue the tradition of taking students from Bishop Heelan High School overseas to the missions in the coming years, and many of this year's participants already want to go again, for which we are grateful. Please continue to pray that the Holy Spirit will bless the NPH orphanage and our students as they go off to college in a few months.

DISCERNMENT FACILITATION PROGRAM

By Sr. Kevin Hermsen, OSB

The Conference of Benedictine Priories in the U.S. felt the need for more trained facilitators for the discernment process in the election of Prioresses. To meet this need, they offered a course last summer which was hosted by the Benedictine Sisters of Elizabeth, N.J. Sr. Lumen and myself attended and found it to be very intense and well done by Srs. Joella Kidwell, Mary Catherine Wenstrup and Cecilia Dwyer. Part of the training was the eventual all of the "students" would be invited to be observers at various elections in the U.S.

From June 6-10th I was invited to observe the election at Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, KS. This was very different for me in that there were 123 Sisters present and unlike our process it culminated in the election of their new Prioress, Sister Esther Fangman. The Sisters were very hospitable and open in letting me be present for the process and I am thankful for the opportunity.

REMEMBERING IWE

By Sr. Ann Terese Dana, OSB

It was a pilgrimage; a pilgrimage to feed our souls through conferences given by our own sisters, and by journeying back to the roots of our congregation and church. It was meeting Christ on the Sacred Steps, St. Peter in his prison cell, and St. Benedict in the cave. It was knowing the persecution of our first Christians by visiting the catacombs. It was getting to know our congregation through inter-priory and inter-cultural sharing with each other about our own priories. It was
renewing our vows where our first pioneer sisters made their vows in Rome at Campo Santo and in Germany. It was praying at the graves/crypts of Fr. Amrhein and Mo. Birgitta Korff. I will remain on the pilgrimage as I clean up my notes and continue to reflect on all that took place.

I am ever so grateful for this opportunity organized by Mo. Angela and our Counselors, and by the sisters at Casa Santo Spiritus and Tutzing Motherhouse. They all worked tirelessly during the time we were with them, feeding us nourishment for our body and our soul. I thank the sisters at Bernried and Haus St. Benedict for their gracious hospitality. I am thankful to our own priories for sending us. And I thank the Lord for my new sister friends participating with me in the International Weeks of Encounter. We saw the beautiful oneness of our congregation. May God be glorified in all we have, to be shared with others. God bless our congregation.

Wishing you all a Happy and Grace-Filled Solemnity of St. Benedict!! May we all draw closer to God and become more deeply rooted in our Missionary Benedictine Life.

Sr. Inviolata Mukhaabi, OSB and the Newsletter Team
Norfolk Priory
Website: www.mbsmissionaries.org

The Lord Bless You and Keep You
The Lord let His Face Shine upon You and Be Gracious to You
The Lord Look upon You Kindly and Give You Peace!