Endurance through Faith

Religious Life

Then and Now

Endurance in Faith
“Endurance through Faith, 
Endurance In Faith”

As I reflect upon religious life then and now, I am overwhelmed by how quickly life has progressed. When I came to visit with our Altar Rosary Society fifty-eight years ago at the age of thirteen, little did I realize that this monastery would become my home.

As I grew to live the Rule of Benedict, I found that its central themes led me back inevitably to the central themes of being human: commitment, balance, and being in relationship with God, others, material possessions and the world.

This Rule was written for monks of the sixth century and therefore to a completely different world from ours in many ways. Yet through the filter of history and culture came an eternal message. As humanity developed, Benedictines have consistently lived out this sixth century message in ways appropriate to each generation. Most importantly, providing witness to the life of prayer lived in human community. The message given in the sixth century continues to speak to humanity today and especially to us as monastic women of faith. We give our lives to the search for the ultimate in life.

This Rule makes it possible for us ordinary folk to live lives of quite extraordinary value. There are no heroics here, no spectacular feats of spiritual accomplishment—just a steady and committed focus on God through the vehicles of prayer, work, relationships and study. Through the development of attitudes about such ordinary things as money, possessions, time, authority and food, our life has been and continues to be radically transformed by grace and endurance in faith.

To live according to a tradition and under a rule of life, is to enter consciously into a process of growth in faith and grace, and to undertake a specific discipline used in the process. However, a rule of life is not undertaken for its own sake. The discipline of a rule of life is undertaken as a means to freedom in God. In ordering one’s life according to a form of spirituality that thousands of people have lived with and found freedom in for fifteen hundred years, one has a better chance of growing in grace than through any lifestyle one could dream up on one’s own.

It is our witness to the common life, our Benedictine values, simply being who we are, that has so much to offer the world today. It is no longer what we do that is desperately needed; it is who we are, how we live our lives as witnesses to the spiritual journey so many seek. For me the witness of our monastic life then and now can be summed up in Dag Hammarskjold’s words:

“For all that has been...thank you. 
For all that will be...yes.”
We are the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh, continuing 1500 years of seeking God in Community, Prayer and Ministry.

BENEDICTINES is a publication of the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh, PA for families, friends and benefactors of the Community.

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Please remember the Benedictine Sisters in your Will.

Mark Your Calendar

Wednesday, June 22 – Sunday, June 26
Community Retreat

Friday, June 24 at Vespers
Jubilee:
50 years
Sisters Audrey Quinn and Roberta Campbell
60 years
Sisters Rosalyn Soller and Mary Kay Easly

Friday, August 5 and Saturday, August 6
Community Days

Sunday, August 28
Mass of Thanksgiving
For Benefactors and Other Friends
(by invitation)

Sunday, October 23
Mass of Thanksgiving
For Heritage Society Members
(by invitation)

December 26
Christmas Party

December 31
Peace Vigil

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Welcome to all our relatives and friends. Come; visit us on our webpage – www.osbpgh.org. We keep it up to date so you will know what is happening with the Sisters at St. Benedict Monastery. While you are on the web, please click on the Facebook icon and “Like” us! You can also take a ride on our St. Patrick’s Day Float, be in the know about “Scenes at the Monastery”, pray with Sister Dolores Conley’s hand-sculpted Stations of the Cross; enjoy our Holy Week and Easter celebrations, and so much more. All the pictures are there waiting for you by clicking on the Flickr icon.
William Barclay once said: “Endurance is not just the ability to bear a hard thing, but to turn it into glory.” We read the same sentiments in St. Paul when he urges the Christians in his first letter to Timothy to bear and endure the suffering of the Gospel.

Anything that is living will experience challenge and change. We see this as the seed germinates and pushes up through the earth. Its tender little life is full of challenge and change. Likewise the blades of grass pushing up through the cement sidewalk show the need to alter and adapt if they are to live. Challenge and change can strengthen or break any living being. Whether they build endurance or defeat makes all the difference in the world. We can readily see the changes in plants and children as they grow. These are not so evident in groups or institutions over time.

We do know, however, that religious life has changed dramatically over the time of its existence. When we look at Benedictine monastic life over fifteen hundred years, we see the same pattern of change and challenge.

Those fifteen centuries can be considered in four major eras in Benedictine monastic life.

- From Benedict in the 500’s to about 1200 when monasteries of men and women were growing throughout Europe.
- From the feudal time of about 1200 until the suppression of Religious in Europe starting in the late 1700’s.
- From the middle 1800’s until the mid-1960’s when many European Monasteries were responding to the call to assist with the mission in North America.
- Finally, the Second Vatican Council which began in 1962 until the present age when there have been many changes and challenges in the world of religious life.

This is not an exhaustive historical study. That has been done in other places. However, the shifts and changes teach us valuable lessons about what has kept one of the longest living religious orders alive and well into the twenty first century.

…Challenges and Changes…

The initial period of Benedictine life must have been exciting and confusing. As some religious people began to live in community together, there were trials and errors and always the underlying desire to seek God. Their only example was the life of the hermit who “fled the world” to live in the desert, believing this was the best way to totally focus on God and prayer. Benedict and his followers believed that the ideal response to the Gospel was to live together as the early Christian community, dedicated to a common life of prayer, simplicity and conversion.
Those years were, for many, times of war and destruction, including the Crusades. Boniface and Walburga responded to the mission call of the Church and carried not only the faith but also the Benedictine spirit to the people in Germany, France and England. Often the monasteries were the places where cultures were preserved in the midst of war. Within the monastery walls, art, books, music and other important works were carefully copied and maintained. To this day, European Benedictine monasteries are places of art and architecture from this early time. Benedict’s Rule attracted many women and men to prayer, community and a life of simplicity while spreading the Gospel message and the growth of Benedictine life.

...Challenges and Changes...

By the 1200’s, the monasteries had participated and advanced the mission emphasis of the times. With that success, there was a need for reforms. The call to return to the primary teaching of the Rule of St. Benedict was experienced in many ways, mostly by a deepening of the interior life of the Monastics. Some new orders were formed to live out a more cloistered expression of the Rule, for example the Cistercians and Camaldolese. The Benedictine houses needed to examine their life of prayer, community and work. At this period, due to the economic and social structures, monasteries were often quite wealthy, and the rich nobles would enter Benedictine life with a retinue of servants to wait on them as well as bring riches and property to the monastery. There were people who came to monastic life not to seek God, but because it was expected of them by devout parents or family.

Some of the difficulty of the time arose because of the management of the wealth and the expectations of those who expected the religious to obey the demands of local Church authorities. This was also an era when new religious orders were being formed to respond to the needs of the time for education and to serve the poor. These forms of religious life tended to be more active in the life of the people in a particular locale than the more enclosed life in the monasteries. Religious women assisted with caring for the wounded during the many wars among nations of this time. They established academies to train children in the arts and developed places of rest for travelers and pilgrims. For the religious of these years to keep their focus on their call by God, as it was lived out in the various communities, was a testimony to the endurance and resilience of these women and men who felt a special vocation. Often in families with a large number of children, there was an expectation that some would dedicate their lives to religious practices. It was said that Hildegard of Bingen, as the tenth child in her family, was “tithed to the monastery” by her parents early in her life.

More of the great saints and reformers of this time traveled and preached about God, like Bernard of Clairvaux and Hildegard. When reformers pushed to have Benedictines return to living their life in the cloister with very little contact with the lay community, some members felt that an important part of their ministry was being taken away.

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In the third period of Benedictine Monastic life (the mid-1800s to the mid-1960s), there was another opportunity to live in the mission spirit of the Church. This was a time when the government in parts of Germany, did not allow nuns to wear the habit or to take in new novices. Some communities were threatened with extinction. Because of the immigration of many European families to the United States to bolster the growing industrialization of the young nation, Benedictines and other religious were recruited to serve in schools, to provide health care, and other needs of the children and families of the transplanted German people. Times were physically hard and with cultural and language barriers to confront, the Benedictines had to change in order to deal with the unprecedented difficulties.

The priests and sisters who came from Europe were used to hard work and simple living. In the rough environment of the United States, they learned to accommodate with the harder circumstances of survival for themselves and those they served. They often gave when they did not have enough themselves, and had to handle the issues of control that arose with people who did not understand the Benedictine way of life. Thousands of students were taught, hospitals were established and the sisters cared for the faith needs of the populace around them in the mission territory of the United States. Many new monasteries were built from the foundation in St. Mary’s, Pennsylvania.

What are our lessons...

Do the challenges lead to change, or despair and fear? Fewer women have entered Benedictine religious life in the past half of the century. The excellent work done by the religious in education and healthcare has now been transitioned to new capable lay leaders of these institutions. Our corporate ministry is not as clearly defined as it was for the first hundred years. As was the case with the Benedictines after the mission fervor of the first era that was discussed, this is a time of going deeper. Can we be contemplatives in the world? Can we share the wisdom and gifts that God gives with others in proximity to the monastery?

Some of the challenges and changes may require a willingness to share simplicity and a life of dedication to God with those who may describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. Can we believe that people who are rich in so many things may be starving for God’s word of courage and mercy? Can we respond to the challenge of our acquisitive world and learn to treasure need without getting lost in want? This time of deepening is a time of questions requiring Benedictines to hold tight to God’s Word and to one another, so that we might change as we are called repeatedly in St. Benedict’s Rule to “prefer nothing to the love of Christ.”

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Oblates: Their Role in Benedictine Life

By: Sr. Roberta Campbell, OSB

The Rule of St. Benedict has been a spiritual guide for common people since the sixth century. It was intended to be used by ordinary people who lived very ordinary lives; it was not written for clerics or religious. The spirituality proposed by the Rule finds its core in the simplicity of seeking God in one’s relationships, one’s approach to work, and one’s view of the world. These values are threaded together in daily prayer, community and ministry.

This spiritual canon has survived fifteen hundred plus years and is as relevant to our work as it was in the fifth century. These values call a person to “live life beyond the superficial or the uncaring … to live ordinary life extraordinarily well”. (Wisdom Distilled From the Daily by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB)

Oblates of St. Benedict are women and men who respond to the call to seek God in their individual lifestyle. They generally are affiliated with a particular monastery where they find support for living the Christian life. The monastery provides opportunities for spiritual development through lectio (shared reading), retreat experiences, monthly meetings, spiritual direction, Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours and volunteer opportunities. The Oblate’s aspiration is to be a person of prayer, a promoter of peace, a living embodiment of the Gospel that St. Benedict weaves throughout his teaching.

These “Benedictines” are true disciples who spread God’s Word in their families, their workplace, their parish community, in their volunteer activities and wherever they find themselves. Oblates are living messengers of the Benedictine charism!

Virginia (Ginny) Cook shared how being an Oblate has impacted her professional life. Ginny says that the directive from the Prologue of the Rule, “listen with the ear of your heart”, caused her to change the way she handled interviews in her law office. “Now I take a new client into a conference room and sit face to face with him/her and I just LISTEN to his/her story. I do not interrupt the story. Only after I have listened do I then start to make notes and ask for facts. This manner of interviewing resolves the problem. Peace is achieved… and it started with LISTENING. There is no peace without justice. We lawyers are in the business of peace.”

Madelyn Svidergol and Cathie Schwarzmeier got involved in the Oblate program because they felt they needed something more in their daily lives. Due to work and retirement demands, everyday situations made life stressful. By deliberately taking time to pray the Liturgy of the Hours either together in the early morning or on the bus as they wend their way to work, they are able to begin their day with a sense of peace and calm. This daily prayer, along with the practice of Lectio, helps to put balance into their lives.

The monthly gatherings of the Oblate group are life-giving for these women and the other fellow Oblates. “We find a sense of peace, a sense of belonging when we come to the Monastery to share with the Community. It’s as simple as listening with the ear of your heart… where have we heard that before?”

The Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh are blessed to have such vital women and men as part of this Monastic Community. As the Sisters look to the future, it is their hope that the Oblates will continue to spread the wisdom of the Rule…that the simple adjunct to “listen”, to “seek God”, to “live the ordinary in an extraordinary manner” will help to bring peace and balance to the world.

For more information on how to become part of these extraordinary men and women Oblates, please contact the Oblate Director: Sister Raphael Frank, OSB at 412-931-2844 or raphfrank@yahoo.com
They came from near and far, these 2011 Jubilarians. Two came from the rolling hills of Cambria County...some would call that “God’s Country.” Two came from the North Side of Pittsburgh...some would call that “Steeler Country.” Each of these women came for one reason. As St. Benedict notes in his chapter on novices, they came “to seek God.”

Their stories are as unique and as different as each woman is, and yet they are the same story because their lives have been and are characterized by fidelity to the God they seek.

Each Jubilarian reflected on the three foundation pillars of Benedictine life: prayer, community and ministry. A tale of two hundred and twenty years has been woven as they reflected on Seeking God, the impact of significant changes in the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh, and their various ministries throughout the years.

Diamond Jubilarian, Sister Mary Kay (Mary James) Easley, a native of St. Edward Parish, Barnesboro PA, can often be found reading a book! A voracious reader by nature, she enjoys helping out where she can. In reflecting on her ministry spanning sixty years she notes that she liked working in the library in Connellsville and helping children with reading. When she was a very young sister, a chicken coop was built and she helped to pick up eggs, feed the chickens and clean their coops. Serving the girls at St. Benedict Academy their lunches also provided special memories to her. Currently she can be found doing various crafts in the gift shop work room and proofreading text for Msgr. Albert Kuuire.

Seeking God in prayer has always been a priority for this Jubilarian. She found Community prayer so much more interesting when the community transitioned from praying in Latin to praying in English. She loves praying the psalms and the liturgy of the Eucharist, as well as participation in charismatic meetings.

During her life in community she has experienced many changes and she notes that the most significant change came in the wake of Vatican II. “I was so happy that Vatican II was formed. Pope John XXIII changed the Mass, breviary (Divine Office) and everything, making it so much more alive in English!”
Sister Rosalyn Soller, a native of St. Boniface Parish, North Side, Pittsburgh, PA, is often remembered as a biology teacher par excellence. Today her love of all things living can be seen in the exquisite garden she tends in the front of St. Teresa of Avila Convent where she currently lives and ministers. Her many years of ministry have provided her with numerous opportunities, “launching her into the ministry of forming hearts and minds.” She has touched the hearts and minds of elementary and high school students as teacher, and the hearts and minds of adults as Catholic school administrator. Sister Rosalyn also states that the ministry of prayer, adult education and formation work, “holds a special place in my life and was and is a privilege and a joy.”

To be prayerfully alive and actively prayerful is her way of expressing “seeking God” which in her view is closely intertwined with seeking wholeness in all of life. For Sister Rosalyn, it is a moving away from the complex view of “time of prayer” versus “time away from prayer”—toward a simple acknowledgement that “all is one.”

A significant change that she has experienced in her sixty years of vowed life in community and one that underlies them all is freedom. Freedom is an awesome responsibility and an essential ingredient in the maturing of the human person. “We now have the greater ability to make choices for our own life and for the life we live together.”

Golden Jubilarian Sister Roberta Campbell, a native of St. Benedict Parish, Carrolltown, PA, and a talented musician, has experienced a variety of ministerial involvements for a half century, including teaching, campus ministry, formation, leadership as prioress and council member. She reflects that the impact of her ministry is not so much WHAT she does, but HOW and FOR whom she does it. The people are significant as she works side by side to serve the greater good – the church, and our ever-widening world circle.

It has been said that “to live is to have changed; to be perfect is to have changed often.” She notes that there have been many changes that the Community has undergone – some with reluctance, many with enthusiasm. Perhaps the most difficult is the recent decision to sell the motherhouse and move to the unknown. She notes that she always thought she’d be an “old nun” teaching piano lessons at the current monastery and now realizes that will not be so. In reference to the many changes that have taken place, Sister Roberta has always found strength in the Community. “We don’t always agree, but the strength comes even when ‘we agree to disagree’ and still remain ‘sisters’ to one another.”

“To seek God in the midst of violence, chaos, poverty, and the many “isms” of our day is what we need to do and encourage others to do likewise. The prayer life of the Community is a source of support for all that we do. Benedict’s admonition to “Seek God always” is the hallmark of the Benedictine lifestyle.”

Sister Audrey Quinn, from Pittsburgh’s North Side and St. Boniface Parish, has always been a quiet yet dynamic model of “the seeker.” She loves to get up early in the morning and enjoy those quiet moments, something she learned to do when she was raising children as a foster parent. The motto of Ora et Labora is one that holds true in her daily life. The rhythm of daily work and prayer blend together to deepen her relationship with God. Whether praying in the morning or cutting grass and planting a garden in the evening, all blend together in her love of God.

Community has been significant for all of this golden Jubilarian’s life. She comments, “Living with a welcoming spirit of community is an opportunity to daily seek God in the ordinary events of life each day. I feel blessed to live in community.”

She reflects that she has enjoyed all of her ministries. Each one had uniquely allowed her to grow in many ways and hopefully touch many lives. Whatever work she is doing, whether it is teaching, fostering children, or assisting those in need with shoes, clothing, and shelter, all are dignified and enriched through her Benedictine life.

These capsules of their lives hold so much more than these few lines say. Each of these Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh has touched the life of our Community, our church and our world and we are grateful that they walk their gentle ways with us!

Ad multos annos, Sisters! We are grateful for you in this momentous celebration of your Benedictine lives.

A jubilee celebration will be observed by the Community on June 24, 2011.
Whir-r-r...whir-r-r... the soft steady hum of the sewing machine in the second floor Monastery craft room is a welcoming sound to all who enter. Seated at the machine with an array of material scraps, is Sister Marcia Koluder busily at work for the Community Gift Shop. As coordinator of the shop, and at the blessed age of 85, Sister Marcia spends copious hours producing all kinds of crafts. When she is not sewing items, working on a new project or sorting through donated items, you will find her in the afternoon hours in her bedroom listening to soft music as she crochets the tops of the ever-popular kitchen towels for eager customers. Thus, she is ever busily engaged in spending her retirement years serving the Lord and her Community.

Dorothea Marian was born in Bovard, a small mining town near Greensburg, PA, on January 29, 1926 and was baptized on Valentine’s Day. Her parents, Thomas and Mary, were thrilled to have this precious child after having birthed four sons before her arrival. Growing up, Dorothea had a happy childhood and loved to play school. She was delighted when she was chosen by her peers and her family to be the teacher. Sister Marcia refers to this time as her “student teaching days”. Her teen years were bitter sweet. God called her mother home to heaven and much of Dorothea’s young life was spent caring for her family and an ill father.

Dorothea lived near St. Vincent Archabbey and the Benedictine priests ministered in her parish. She did not know any Benedictine Sisters at that time, but the priests were a great influence on her life. She attended Mass daily and she grew in her spiritual life. Drawn to serve God in a special way, Dorothea decided to enter the Benedictine Community of Sisters in Pittsburgh in 1950.

Dorothea, newly named Sister Marcia, attended Duquesne University and received her Masters of Education at Marygrove College in Detroit. This education helped prepare her for a “real” teaching career. For 45 years, Sister Marcia delighted in enlightening students in the Pittsburgh, Greensburg and Altoona-Johnstown Dioceses. She also served as Principal at St. Teresa of Avila School in Perrysville, PA, and was coordinator at Greensburg Central Catholic High School Faculty House.

In addition to her years of teaching, Sister Marcia also served as Director of Scholastics (a mentor for the non-finally professed Sisters) for six years, was a member of the Community Council, served on the Administrative Team for several years as well as participating in many forms of Community committee work. Sister also enjoyed the Office of Procurator (dispenser of goods and took care of the needs of the Sisters) and was Monastery sacristan for 12 years. Sister Marcia’s life has been full of dedication as she has served the God she loves.

Since prayer has always been an important facet in Sister Marcia’s life, her peaceful demeanor attests to this fact. Sister loves the Sisters in this Community and appreciates the support she feels each day. With such loving support she is enabled to continue to serve God faithfully.

Realizing that change is inevitable, Sister Marcia’s prayer is that she will continue to maintain the burning desire she had when she first entered religious life – to lovingly serve God and her Community. “Life will experience changes as it has in the past, but with God everything is possible. He has guided us thus far,” says the octogenarian, “and will continue to do so in the future.”
Sister M. Rose Budicky, OSB
By: Sister Susanne Chenot, OSB

Sister Rose was born of first-generation Slovak immigrants, and raised in the Benedictine “strong-hold” of Carrolltown, PA. The first Pittsburgh Benedictine Motherhouse was located there, before the Community moved to the city of Pittsburgh. She was one of six siblings: Anna, Catherine (who later became Sister Magdalen, OSB), George, John, and Bill.

Sister Rose was educated at St. Benedict Grade School, and then at Carrolltown High School. The First National Bank in Carrolltown gave Sister Rose her start in the field of finance during her senior year in high school. She continued working there for six and a half years, until she felt called to give her life to the service of God, and entered the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh. She joined her sister, Sister Magdalen, who had entered before Sister Rose was born.

Sister Rose’s career as an educator began at St. Athanasius School in West View, where she taught fourth grade for one year, and the following year at St. Teresa of Avila School, Perrysville, where she taught second grade. The next year, she began teaching at St. Benedict Academy. During these years, she completed her Education Degree at Duquesne University and a Master’s Degree in Theology at St. Francis College in Loretto, Pennsylvania.

After fourteen years of full-time teaching, Sister Rose became part-time in the Business Office at St. Benedict Monastery and then full-time. While in the Business Office, she was Treasurer of the Benedictine Sisters, and St. Benedict Academy for twelve of those years. She managed the Investment Portfolio of the Benedictine Sisters for twenty-eight years, before continuing part-time. These years in the Business Office involved the transition from the manual accounting system to a computer-based system. Her entire active life was mostly spent ministering to the Community’s financial needs.

Sister Rose’s position as Treasurer allowed her to attend many NATRI (National Association of Treasurers of Religious Institutes) meetings in different parts of the country. Due to her Slovak heritage, and in the company of family members, Sister Rose was able to make several trips to Europe, meeting relatives in Slovakia and enjoying some mountain climbing in the Tatry Mountains, with stop-over visits in Rome and Lourdes, enroute to Slovakia.

In these later years, Sister Rose has been beset with physical ailments. During treatment, she has not wavered in her life of prayer. No longer working in the Business Office, she can be seen every day, wending her way either to chapel for Divine Office or to the dining room for meals. Her commitment to Christ Crucified is uppermost in her mind.

Looking into the future, Sister Rose hopes that the value of our prayer life and our ministries within and outside the Community will strengthen us to carry on as the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh.

Looking into the future, Sister Rose hopes that the value of our prayer life and our ministries within and outside the Community will strengthen us to carry on as the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh.
The lighting is low – candlelight flickers off the corridor walls while the carol of “O, Come Little Children” softly echoes down the hallway. The shadows advance with the procession of women as they wend their way toward the dining room to begin the celebration of the Feast of Christmas. This same custom has occurred every year since the Community began in 1870 – tracing its roots to their founding Sisters that first came to St. Marys, PA, in 1852 from their 11th century Abbey in Eichstatt, Bavaria.

On the Feast of the Assumption, the end of this Marian Novena was celebrated by a procession to the Grotto of Our Lady which is located on the front lawn of the Monastery Campus. There the Sisters – young and old – would gather for a special blessing upon their ministry for that year. That blessing is still given each year in Marian Chapel during the Commissioning Service at the end of Community Days. Each Sister is recognized and “sent forth from the Monastic body” with a blessing for herself and those that she will serve throughout the year.

Through the years, the postulant (initial phase of formation into religious life) was welcomed at the “door” of the Monastery by the Prioress and Community Members. In the early days, the newest member begged “patience” of each Sister as she began her pilgrim journey of monastic life with this group. The communal response of each Sister was, “may God grant you the grace of final perseverance”. While the wording has slightly changed with the times, the new member still knocks at the door asking to be admitted and the Community members respond with open embraces for the new Postulant.

These customs have lasted through changes in both the Church and in the World. It is a testament to the Rule of St. Benedict that encourages his followers to make Christ the centerpiece of their lives, their prayer, their living and their ministry. The Novenas for Christmas, Easter, Holydays and Benedictine Saints all have deep roots in the faith life of the Sisters. It is this spiritual nourishment through the ages that has enabled these women of St. Benedict to “endure through Faith and have endurance in Faith”.

It is particularly significant that many of the rituals that have lasted incorporate the element of journey. It is befitting that as pilgrim people of God, we continue to journey with one another – to look always toward our goal – to become one with Christ.
Sustaining the Legacy: Dr. Diann Westrick, MD

By: Alison Serey

Dr. Diann Marie Westrick learned early on to believe in herself—that she could achieve her dreams. She began her education at St. Benedict’s School in Carrolltown, PA, and continued to attend classes there through the eighth grade. The Benedictine nuns who taught there made a lasting impression upon her.

“They were tremendous role models,” says Diann. “There weren’t a lot of professional women in those days, and in Carrolltown, the Benedictine nuns were the only professional role models we had! They were dedicated to educating us, and we learned from their example. I was fascinated by how competent, patient and inclusive they were, and so peaceful.”

“There were 72 students in my first-grade class, and one nun supervised several groups learning at different levels without assistance. They expected me to be responsible. I was taught I had God-given talents and the best way to show gratitude for His gifts was to perform to the best of my ability at all times.”

“I always liked figuring out how things work and in high school I excelled in biology,” she continues. “I grew up on a farm, and we had a great small-town family doctor. I figured if I became a doctor, I would be able to help people and make a difference in the world. Influenced by Benedictine nuns, there was no question that I could achieve this dream—I could become a professional woman, a medical doctor.”

“Catholic education was free in those days, and cutting-edge. It was the best educational foundation any young person could receive. Consequently, I learned from the Benedictine nuns the importance of work and prayer. Often when people ask me about my education, I tell them that it’s not so important where I went to college or medical school, it’s more important where I went to grade school. A major part of the foundation for the rest of my life was laid at St. Benedict School in Carrolltown.”

Diann has never lost touch with the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh. They were very supportive of her through medical school, and she credits the late Sister Pauline Stevens for keeping her on track while attending the Milton S. Hershey Medical School of the Pennsylvania State University. “Sister Pauline was one of the many Sisters whose intervention made a significant difference in my life,” she says. “I’m so glad I followed through and realized my dream regardless of the challenges before me at that time.”

A few months before Diann’s graduation, Sister Rita Yahner passed away. The next time Diann visited the Monastery, she received a package Sr. Rita had left for her. Inside she found a letter and a plaque with messages about being the best one can be, fulfilling dreams and not being afraid of trying something out of the ordinary.

“It has always been like that—whenever I need anything, the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh are always there for me,” Diann says. “They are the most fantastic women I’ve ever met! So I do what I can to be there for them. And what’s so wonderful is that to support them is also to help others. Their mission and ministries are as vital today as they were when I was growing up. Without question, the Benedictine legacy has a lot to offer and is a significant influence in our world. Investing in the Benedictine legacy is very important to me.”

Diann came to Pittsburgh to do her residency. She stayed to teach at the former St. Francis Hospital and then Mercy Hospital, and was the Sisters’ house physician for several years before moving to Philipsburg. “I like Pittsburgh, but I love the country and always wanted to be a country doctor,” she says. “I’m living my dream and hope by my example, others believe they can do the same.”

Diann is Board Certified in Internal Medicine and Geriatric Medicine. She enjoys kayaking in her free time and reading mystery novels. She especially likes The Cadfael Chronicles by Ellis Peters, which features a Welsh Benedictine monk living at Shrewsbury Abby in western England in the first half of the 12th century.

Dr. Diann Marie Westrick is a member of the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh’s Heritage Society. For information about how you can help to ensure the Benedictine Legacy for future generations and become a member of the Heritage Society, contact Alison Serey at (412) 931-8968 or osbpgh@osbpgh.org.
At one time, the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh had a single corporate mission – to serve through education. Each Sister was assigned to a position that was either teaching or one that supported the teaching of the others. As soon as our Sisters came to America, they began teaching. First the school was in the convent, and then a large school was built on monastery property. As the years went by, many people could look back on their Catholic School days with the Benedictine Sisters. Those are now happy memories of days gone by.

However, the Sisters continue to endure through faith and in faith as they seek to reach out and serve those in need. Now each Sister seeks her own ministry within that new mission. The work of Religious life is more varied these days, but the 1500 year old tradition of seeking God in prayer, in Community, and in ministry remains the same.

Hospitality continues to be a focus for these women of St. Benedict. Whether it is during a retreat, spa day, bible study class, monastic sampler or a chance visit to pray with the Sisters, all are welcome to their monastery home.

Women Religious of the Diocese of Pittsburgh were awarded the Ad Lucem (to light) Award at the annual La Roche College Founders Gala on March 19 held at the Westin Convention Center Hotel. The award recognizes individuals whose vision, leadership and determination have transformed their dreams into contributions to society, the community and the professions. Representatives of 27 communities that minister within the diocese were present. The Benedictine community was represented by the following Sisters: Benita DeMatteis, Bridget Reilly, Dolores Conley, Evelyn Dettling, Jeanne Ubinger, Karen Brink, Lucille Snyder, Raphael Frank and Rosalyn Soller. The program consisted of a reception, silent auction, dinner and program. The theme of the speakers was “Women of Integrity.”

The Benedictines for Peace organized a special prayer service for Lent entitled, Jesus, Redeemer: Yesterday and Today – Now and Evermore. The service elaborated on the Stations of the Cross and related the sufferings and resurrection of Jesus to the sufferings of individuals caught in the trap of slavery and human trafficking, and the efforts being made to free them.

Sister Karen Brink was delighted to report that St. Teresa of Avila School will receive $80,000 from a foundation in response to a grant she and her team wrote. The funds will be used for the Fine Arts Department and will include new lighting and sound system for the stage, new auditorium chairs, a new music text series, display walls for the art department and a digital/video camera. Sr. Karen is the elementary school principal at St. Teresa of Avila.

Sister Roberta Campbell helped to facilitate the elections for Prioress in both Colorado Springs, CO and Bristow, VA. Sr. Roberta was involved in the Visitation process for the community in Colorado Springs last November.

Sister Susanne Chenot was one of the speakers at the series of Lenten lectures sponsored by the Scottsdale Area Association of Churches. The Ministerium is attempting to engender an atmosphere of respectful listening without reaction during the Lenten season.

Sister Benita DeMatteis, Prioress, attended a meeting of the Benedictine Abbots and Prioresses in February. The Benedictine Abbots and Prioresses hold a combined workshop every three years. This year the meeting occurred at Marywood Retreat Center of the St. Augustine Diocese in Jacksonville, Florida. The presenter was Father Michael Casey of Tarrawarra Abbey, Australia. His topic was the initial and ongoing formation for monastics. The Prioresses of all the Federations held a two day business meeting before the workshop.

Sister Evelyn Dettling accepted the position of Development Associate in January at the invitation of Alison Serey, Director of the Office of Community Advancement (OCA), and with the approval of Sister Benita DeMatteis, Prioress. Sister Evelyn is now working with Alison and Sr. Jeanne Ubinger in the OCA. She says she feels blessed to be engaged in a ministry that involves such a variety of activities that are important to the future and well-being of the Community.

Sister Evelyn Dettling and Sister Kathleen McNany, OSB, from Lutherville, MD, facilitated a process leading to the election of the Prioress at Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL, on March 10 - 13 and April 7 - 10.

By: Sister Susan Merrie English, OSB

Find us on the Web at www.osbpgh.org
Celebrate with someone who is marking a special occasion, comfort someone who is grieving, or offer prayers for someone who is ill by sending them a Spiritual Bouquet.

Spiritual Bouquet Cards commemorate any occasion and allow you to honor a loved one, living or deceased, in a lasting way. Persons honored are remembered by our Sisters in their daily prayers and ministries, and at the offering of the Eucharist each day at the Monastery. The deceased are also remembered in the prayers and sufferings of our elderly or ill Sisters and in a series of special Masses offered in November each year.

When you remember your loved ones with Spiritual Bouquets, you may also help to bring peace to the world and to assist strangers in need. By including voluntary offerings, you support our 1500 year-old-mission and legacy of seeking God in Prayer, Community and Ministry!

To request a set of Spiritual Bouquet Cards, please contact our Office of Community Advancement at 412-931-2844 x 101 or at osbpgh@osbpgh.org. Thank you.

Sister Susan Merrie English celebrated with the rest of the faculty of the Professional Coach Certification Program at Duquesne University when they received word that their application for full accreditation as an International Coach Federation Accredited Coach Training Program was awarded. A new training class began in April and a second class will begin in September, 2011.

Sister Joann Hothersall continues to enjoy her work for Mercy Intellectual Disabilities Service (formally known as Mercy Behavioral Health). She has been working there for over three years.

Sister Linda Larkman will be attending the Benedictine Sisters’ Workshop and Retreat (BSWR) at Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL from June 21 - July 12th. Sr. Linda is preparing for her Perpetual Monastic Profession.

Sister Anne Lazar has come to live at the Monastery after 18 years of ministering at St. John the Baptist at Scottdale. She is keeping herself busy with internal ministry, answering the phone, helping with dishes and helping with crafts.

Sister Irene Moeller participated in a panel presentation to the St. Teresa of Avila fourth and fifth grade Religious Education students on March 15 during their regular class period. The lesson was on Answering God’s Call: Vocations in the Church. Sister Irene spoke of her Benedictine vocation as a consecrated religious woman.

Sister Judith Nero, who is the Manager for Leo Meyer Manor, McKees Rocks, arranged for a presentation by one of the residents, a native of Sri Lanka, who is the coordinator of the Sri Lanka community in Pittsburgh. The presentation entitled, “An Armchair Passage to Sri Lanka,” was complete with refreshments and travel posters. Sister Judith expressed that it provided an opportunity to expand horizons.

Sister Bridget Reilly and Sister Georgine Schweers walked in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade on March 12, 2011.

Sister Florence Lynch and Sister Dolores Conley rode in the parade on the float they helped create with the Junior Hibernians.

Sister Mary Damian Thaner was recently featured on the front page of the Monday, March 21 edition of the Pittsburgh Post Gazette. The article, written by Ann Rodgers, was entitled Retirement’s not an option at age 96 for Benedictine Nun. Sister Mary Damian tutors foreign students in English as a second language and leads a weekly Bible reading group at LifePittsburgh.

Sister Mary Damian Thaner was part of a program sponsored by the Andy Warhol Museum and The Saturday Light Brigade. Senior Citizens of the North Side of Pittsburgh were interviewed by students of the Manchester Academic Charter School. The purpose of the program was to acquaint the students with information about the North Side as it existed in the “good old days.”

Sister Joanna Hothersall

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It was in the fall of 1954 when I first met Dorothy Seidel. She was 16 and I was 14. Dorothy was about to begin her junior year of high school and her last year in the Aspirant Class, before entering the Novitiate. There were 12 aspirants and our directress Sister Mary Grace living together in the monastery. It was an interesting family away from home.

When I think of Dorothy, I see her sitting in her assigned seat: first row, first seat, by the classroom door. Being the oldest and the only Junior, she was given charge of keeping the rest of us – four Sophomores and six Freshmen, reasonably quiet when Sister Mary Grace wasn’t present for whatever reason, but particularly when she was attending the prayer of Matins and Vespers each afternoon. Dorothy was quiet and reserved and I admired her mature ways. She had a calming personality while some of us delighted in stirring up the atmosphere. Not Dorothy, she was “well on her way” to becoming one of the best Benedictines ever. We had yet to shake off some of our “other worldly” ways. Just looking to Dorothy as our example was a no-brainer. She was so good that it was not difficult to want to be like her. Therefore, when she told us to quiet down, we did so because she told us ever so softly.

Dorothy left us in the fall of 1955 to enter the Postulancy. Even though we occupied the same building, we only saw her from a distance and we were not to communicate lest we would be a distraction!

In 1956, Dorothy was invested as Sister M. Helen (her mother’s name) and thus began her Novice year of intense training in the ways of monasticism. She made her first Profession of Vows in the summer of 1957 and began teaching children in the primary grades. Sister Helen really enjoyed the children and they responded to her.

For 23 years, Sister Helen ministered as a teacher in Catholic elementary schools. Shortly thereafter, she directed religious catechetical programs in local parishes for several years. Following catechetical ministry, Sister Helen continued to reach out to others through child-care, adult care, and home-care. She was very talented with cooking, sewing, and of course making folks comfortable through her sincere way of caring.

A few years ago, Sister Helen developed some serious medical difficulties which are always challenging even to the strongest among us. Sister Helen at times continued, with the best of her strength, to help out as portress (answering the community telephone and front door).

Sister is sorely missed by her sisters in community and her siblings: Anna, Ruth and Rudy, as well as relatives and friends.

PRAY FOR US, SISTER HELEN.
Sister Charlotte Abel, OSB
By: Sister Elizabeth Matz, OSB

Helen Mary Abel was born the third child of eleven siblings to Henrietta and Charles Abel on September 24, 1917 in Hasting, PA. Life in a large family required much concern for each other as well as the acceptance of responsibilities. At an early age, Helen’s talent for cooking was affirmed at the wood burning stove with the guidance of her caring mother. Helping with bread baking and soup making became a joy and a challenge for Helen.

On September 8, 1934 Helen entered the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh, PA. The following July, Helen Mary received the name Sister Charlotte and began her formal studies as a Benedictine woman. The Sisters soon came to know Sister Charlotte as “Charlie” because she would announce her presence when she entered a room in her own magical manner—“Charlie’s here”! Sister was professed July 11, 1936.

Sister Charlotte ministered 59 years as teacher, principal, administrator, catechist and Director of Nutrition inspiring the lives she touched. Her spunky spirited ways demonstrated the zeal and concern for each person’s learning and development. Love of God and love of neighbor was paramount in Sister’s life.

Throughout these years of ministry, Sister Charlotte continued her own educational development, ultimately obtaining professional certificates in Elementary and Secondary Education with emphasis in History and Biology.

With the impact of the Vatican Council II, Sister Charlotte accepted the challenge of change and updated her studies in catechesis to meet the new requirements. These certifications enabled her to administer a Religious Education program in the Diocese of Greensburg.

When a job opening at the Benedictine Senior Center became available, Sister Charlotte accepted the management position of the Nutrition services. The next seven years were filled with not only meeting the State and County requirements of nutrition standards, but welcoming each person with hospitality and providing a sense of security. Her love for colorful clothing and her adamant effort to provide the best made Sister Charlotte the sunshine for many Senior Citizens. There was also a personal touch when Sister shared her homemade zucchini bread or a jar of peach jam.

Retirement was out of the question for Sister Charlotte. She always wished to be with the Community for Prayer and enjoyed all the fun times. Sister enjoyed participating in the program LifePittsburgh and all the activities this experience offered. After 74 years of Benedictine living and service, Sister Charlotte journeyed to God January 1, 2011.

When thinking of Sr. Charlotte, the following phrase comes to mind: “A Valiant Woman is far beyond the price of Pearls”.

“Listen carefully, my child... with the ear of your heart.”
Rule of St. Benedict
Traditional IRA Conversions to a Roth IRA and Charitable Giving

By: Gregory W. Walkauskas, Esquire

While it is too late to take advantage of spreading your income from the conversion of your Traditional IRA to a Roth IRA over two years (2011 and 2012), there are still planning opportunities that you can utilize to lessen the tax impact of such a conversion or partial conversion.

First, remember the advantages of a Roth IRA: all of the distributions from a Roth IRA (after reaching age 59 ½ and after the 5-year period beginning with the first taxable year for which a contribution was made to a Roth IRA established for your benefit) are free from federal income taxes, including distributions of earnings on contributions. Roth IRA’s are still subject to Pennsylvania Inheritance and Federal Estate Tax (a consideration for Federal Estates over 5 million dollars). But you don’t have to take the required minimum distribution from a Roth IRA that you must take from a Traditional IRA after you reach age 70 ½. As a result, the Roth IRA is potentially a great vehicle for accumulating wealth that can be left to children or grandchildren or a charity. Note that after a Roth IRA owner dies, the beneficiary (other than the decedent’s spouse) will have to start taking a required minimum distribution over his or her lifetime based on the beneficiary’s life expectancy.

Consequently, even though the advantage of spreading over two years the taxable income of converting your Traditional IRA to a Roth IRA was available only in 2010, there are still good reasons to convert some or all of your Traditional IRA’s.

One tax planning idea a Traditional IRA owner could use to offset the income resulting from a conversion or partial conversion is to make a donation to charity. A charitable deduction would offset all or some of the income from the IRA conversion.

The Sisters continue to make plans for the future of ministries to the needy of the regions where they serve and reside.
For example, if you have Traditional IRA’s totaling $100,000 (invested in various mutual funds) and you decide to transfer one of the funds worth $10,000 to a Roth IRA as a partial conversion, the $10,000 of income (assuming the Traditional IRA’s do not have any basis) would be included in your income. If then you make a donation of $10,000 to a charity, you can reduce the impact of this inclusion. This donation may allow you to remain in the same tax bracket you would have been in without the conversion. Note, if you are currently on Medicare or within two years of being eligible for Medicare, the conversion may increase your modified adjusted gross income (your adjusted gross income plus tax exempt interest) which would not be offset by the charitable deduction. An unintended result of the IRA conversion could be a higher Medicare premium.

If you donate appreciated stock that you have held for more than one year, you may deduct as a charitable contribution the fair market value of that stock. The donated stock is eligible for an immediate federal income tax deduction only up to 30% of adjusted gross income. But you avoid the tax on the long-term capital gain and can carry forward the unused charitable deduction for five years, after which time you lose the ability to deduct unused donations.

Therefore, suppose you own 300 shares of stock of Verizon which you bought more than 1 year ago for $25.00 per share, and you donate it to charity when it’s worth $35.00 per share, you get a $10,500 federal income tax deduction. You can offset the income generated by the IRA by this deduction, assuming your adjusted gross income is $35,000 or greater.

If you do not want to give all of the stock to one single charity, but you also do not want to handle smaller transfers of stock to numerous charities, the solution may be to donate the stock to a public charity that offers a donor-advised fund program.

A donor-advised fund allows you to make an irrevocable charitable contribution, take an immediate tax deduction (subject to the 30% of adjusted gross income requirement), and support your favorite causes in future years. Rather than making a large, one-time donation to a charity, a donor-advised fund allows you to establish a reserve of charitable dollars that you can use to recommend grants to a full range of charities when you want.

Often the brokerage company that holds your stock portfolio will have access to a public charity that offers a donor-advised fund. If so, you could probably donate the security you own that is held in your brokerage account directly to the donor advised fund on line. This allows you the flexibility of donating a stock when you feel it is at its highest value.

Note that converting a Traditional IRA to a Roth IRA is not subject to a Pennsylvania Personal Income Tax.
We are the Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh, continuing 1500 years of seeking God in Community, Prayer and Ministry.

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