



Women and their gifts

A Message from Anne Stedman, OSB Prioress

*“Love when it is joyful radiates, a few reflect its light,
and the secret glory waxes into the world like morning into the sky.”*

Caryll Houselander

Each year, during the Advent Christmas Season, I reread a small book entitled *The Reed of God* by Caryll Houselander, an English mystic. In this book Caryll spoke simply, yet eloquently, of Mary during her time of waiting for Jesus to be born. So when I recently came across the quote above, I immediately thought of Mary’s joyful love and light that continues to wax into our world in the 21st century. In this issue of the Review I would like to briefly share a few reflections on Mary and a Benedictine mystic who both are so integral to our lives.

Right before Christmas our movers, Two Men and a Truck, gave the Community a beautiful picture of the young Mary kissing the new born Jesus with the title “*Kissing the Face of God*” (see photo).

Reflecting on this portrait, I was reminded of how Mary’s unconditional love:

- embraced the intense joy of bearing and caring for Jesus in his younger years,
- opened her heart to becoming his first disciple calling him forth into ministry,
- and endured the horrendous pain of watching him suffer and die on the cross.

Mary’s life is one of prophetic witness for each of us who choose to echo her “yes” to God’s call. Our vision of monastic life is a strong desire to support our call to become radical signs of God’s love and compassion during these times of chaos, violence and survival.

Within our Benedictine ancestry Hildegard of Bingen was a woman who allowed herself to be formed and transformed by the Word of God. In that transformation she experienced herself as ‘*God’s trumpet*’ and the ‘*Divine Harpist’s Lyre*’ within the tumultuous times within the church and state of the 12th century, not unlike our own. The daily Benedictine rhythm of *lectio* (sacred reading), *oratio* (prayer), *meditation*, and *contemplatio* created an environment where Hildegard’s inquisitive mind, intuitive spirit, and wisdom-filled soul could merge into some of wisdom’s most prized daughters: understanding, discernment and fear of the Lord.

At age 42 she received a special form of *visio*, a brilliant light which inflamed her entire being; and with this light came the command to reveal her revelations. Her prophetic role was endorsed and her counsel appealed to, by both secular and religious leaders of her day – Pope Eugenius III, German Emperor Barbarossa, and Eleanor of Aquitaine as well as many others.

In each of the pivotal events of her life, we see her entering into a deeper union with her God and the Paschal mystery of Jesus: in wonder and questioning, in gratitude and suffering, in death and rising, and in ultimate transformation. **We recognize this as a profound description of Hildegard’s monastic vow of conversatio which today we call *fidelity to the monastic way of life*.**

Externally the church and world of the twelfth century and beyond were visibly touched by Hildegard, who echoed John the Baptist’s challenge; “Repent and believe the Good News.” Hildegard dared to present an inclusive image of God, a cosmic view of the world, and the intrinsic good of humanity. The ‘*Divine Harpist’s Lyre*’ presented a symphony of harmony for her century and for centuries to come.

Mary and Hildegard are mentors in our daily lives as we call ourselves to be Women of the Word; we pray that the Word will singe our hearts and spirits so that we may live and speak the truth in love, preferring nothing to the love of Christ. We are a contemporary monastic presence with you and for you in this new monastery and invite you to come to this sacred forest to visit and to rest awhile.†



Sister in the Spotlight

Sister Therese O'Grady

by Gina Berger



If you make my word your home, you will indeed be my disciple; you will learn the truth and the truth will make you free.

John 8:31-32

The scripture from the Gospel of John has guided Sister Therese O'Grady's heart and passion in ministry for over fifty years. As she reflected on her own story, she remembered that her call to become a sister began as a child with reading the book, *Damien the Leper*. During that time, she had a child's dream of going to the Island of Molokai and working with lepers. And since that time, Sister Therese credits her Benedictine Community for providing the opportunities in education and spiritual growth which have enabled her to follow her call to help others, especially in teaching prayer and spiritual guidance with a special passion for ministering to women.

Three events in Sister Therese's life have contributed to her formation and awareness of her gifts for working with adults (women in particular). The first turning point for Sister Therese happened in 1969 when she began working in adult religious formation with Sister Marian Bellotti in Cheyenne, WY. Through her experience, she became evermore aware of the keen sense of joy she experienced while working with adults. This desire awakened and affirmed inside her heart that ministering to adults was a true gift.

The second event occurred at a Holy Apostle's parish staff retreat in Sedalia, CO almost a decade later. Fr. Ed Kinerk, the retreat facilitator, asked the staff members to name what gifts they needed from each other. Many of the staff indicated that they needed Sister Therese to teach them about prayer and spiritual guidance. Later on, she confided in Fr. Ed that she did not have those gifts. To which he replied, "I'm afraid you do." It was the beginning of Therese's naming, claiming, and affirming these gifts for herself.

The third incident happened at La Puente Shelter in Alamosa, when a severely bruised and battered woman remarked one day, "It didn't bother me much, until he went after the children." Sister Therese

realized at that moment how many women devalued their worth and gifts. This was another affirmation on her journey to minister to women and adults.

"It is impossible to reach our goals while discriminating against half the human race. As study after study has shown us, there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women."

-Kofi Annan



Ghanian Folk Art
People holding the globe

Sister Therese believes that "the greatest gift of women in the world and in the church is 'love and forgiveness'. Often these gifts are denied or ignored. Women's energy, creativity and capacity for love and forgiveness are gifts that need to be encouraged and celebrated."

Just like the song says, but with a slightly different refrain..."What the world needs now are the gifts of love and forgiveness"... This brings others to negotiating, collaborating and creating solutions. "Women must be encouraged to see their value and have awareness of their gifts by overcoming the fear of speaking out. Women of the third world have so much to teach us about overcoming fear and acting courageously." Sister Therese speaks with great passion about women and the need for recognizing their own giftedness as she continues to teach about prayer and spiritual guidance as the Formation Director and the Program Director of Contemplative Vision.



Oblate News

by Katherine Wawersich, OSB

Second Benedictine Oblate World Conference, Rome The religious challenges of today – the Benedictine answer

In 2005 the International Congress of Benedictine Oblates convened for the first time in Rome, Italy with representative oblates from Benedictine Monasteries of men and women throughout the world. The success of the Congress ensured follow-up events every four years. In 2008, Benet Hill Monastery was selected by lottery for the 2009 Congress among a number of others from the United States. Barbara Neilon who is on the oblate coordinator team represented our Benet Hill Oblates. The Congress was a tremendous opportunity for oblates to relate and discuss issues and to pray and share community with oblates from all over the world.

My Experience at the World Congress by Barbara Neilon

In October 2009 I joined 250 Benedictine oblates from thirty-two countries for the second International World Congress in Rome. We gathered in Rome at the invitation of the Abbot Primate to meet and exchange experiences with men and women from other countries who have committed themselves to particular Benedictine monasteries in order to share in the spiritual path that St. Benedict laid out in his Rule.



Monastery of San Benedetto
Subiaco, Italy

For nine days we shared prayer, meals, ideas, celebrations and even pilgrimages with our brother and sister oblates from Africa, Europe, Australia, Asia, and the Americas.

Each oblate had a story of their journey of commitment to use the tools of St. Benedict's Rule as lived in their home monasteries to shape their own spiritual growth. We heard oblates from Asia and Africa tell of difficulties they encounter in non-Christian environments and the challenges of economic survival at their monasteries.

Each day we celebrated Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours together in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Latin. Even though we could not always understand the language, we could participate in song and by adding our own *Amen*.

We visited the abbey at Subiaco where St. Benedict began his ministry. We renewed our oblations during Eucharist at the rebuilt Abbey of Monte Cassino which was nearly destroyed during World War II. Together we received the blessing of Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square for the Sunday Angelus.

“As I returned from Rome, I felt not only renewed in my own commitment as a Benet Hill oblate, but part of a much larger Benedictine community of oblates around the world. I continue to meditate on the teachings of the Congress, and keep in touch with other U.S. delegates.”

Liturgy of the Hours Workshop

On January 23rd the oblate directors held an information workshop on Liturgy of the Hours, often called the Divine Office. While intended for oblate candidates the workshop was open to anyone interested in knowing more about or wanting to pray the Liturgy of the Hours.

Barb Neilon gave a power point presentation explaining the history and the elements that make up the Liturgy of the Hours (LOH). She also explained the difference between the Roman and Benedictine rites of the LOH.

Consisting basically of psalms and scripture or other appropriate readings, praying the Hours has been the foundation of the prayer life of Benedictines since the time of St. Benedict.

Barb spoke of the “value of praying the Hours. How can I pray the Office with more attention? Where can I find help in praying the Office?” And much more. The workshop concluded with praying the Hour of Noon Praise.

The larger community is always welcome to pray the LOH with the Benet Hill Sisters. For the monastery schedule, visit our website www.benethillmonastery.org and select Liturgy from the side menu.



New Oblates At Solemn Vespers on November 22, 2009, Mary Kay Schweitzer and Lynn Espinoza became oblate novices. Prior to becoming novices, they were mentored as candidates on the meaning and importance of praying Liturgy of the Hours and Lectio Divina.

As novices they will study the Rule of Benedict and discern how they can apply it to their daily lives. Please pray for them as they walk this journey.



Alumnae Profile *by Colleen "CoCo" Royal*

When I ponder my first days at Benet Hill

Respect, tolerance, social awareness through Dance

As the Colorado director of this in-school residency, depicted in the movies "Mad Hot Ballroom" and "Take

Colleen -Class of '77 Academy, I remember looming marble stairs, a scurry of crested white wool blazers, and an array of black floating skirts. I had been unwillingly transported from sunny California in the middle of my junior year, and not even my classmates introduction to 'cadets' could quell my desire to leave.

The Lead", I have found great inspiration through the resiliency of the fifth grade children who throw away their parents prejudice and combine ethnicities to dance a vibrant "Cha Cha". Utilizing the vehicle of ballroom dance to teach respect, tolerance, and social awareness, **Dancing Classrooms** has inspired me to enroll in college and pursue my passion for the education of our children. In August 2010, I will be moving to the East Coast where I will begin another chapter of **Dancing Classrooms** while I continue my education (joint BA/MA) at Columbia University.

Fortunately, my memories, and demeanor have matured, and I have come to realize the impact my time at BHA had on my life.

Twenty-two years in the ballroom dance business allowed me to travel, compete, and live the life depicted as a professional on "Dancing With The Stars". As a top studio manager, judge, US National Champion, and one of only two women to ever win *Top Teacher* at the *US Dance Sport Championships*, I have enjoyed all the benefits of a glamorous career. Today, my love for mentoring young people, fostered when coaching our US ice dancers, coupled with the dancing, has

Among my peers at The Women's College of DU, I have become "CoCo" again, the nickname given to me by my 'sisters' at BHA. In 1977, all I wanted to do was graduate and leave that moniker behind. Today, visiting the monastery, I fondly peruse the artifacts brought from Chelton Road. I appreciate both the spiritual and educational foundation that became a basis for my successful career and subsequent goals in education and philanthropy. I believe this passion was greatly influenced by the wonderfully committed, and continuing, example from the Sisters of BHA.

developed into a non-profit program for children called

Dancing Classrooms.



Some of my other "kids": Alex and Maris, Ice Dance Champs



Book Review *by Charlotte Redpath, OSB*

Spiritual Questions for the Twenty-first Century

Edited by Mary Hembrow Snyder 2001, Orbis Books, Marnbull, NY--the book is available in the Benet Gift Shop,

This FESTCHRIFT was written primarily as a tribute to Joan Chittister to honor her as a significant prophetic voice of the Catholic church. Editor Mary Hembrow Snyder elicited essays from thinkers/writers who have been involved in the contemporary spirituality of our time to share what they considered to be the most important questions for the twenty-first century.

The wide diversity in the individual's responses focus on questions which are attuned to our times, our present images of God, and the new world view. Elizabeth Johnson writes "The Spiritual/Ethical question of our Right Relation with the Earth emerges as a new vitally important issue; one that encompasses all others, including relationship with God and peaceful justice among humans." Rembert Weakland suggests the concept of "our need to develop spirituality of wholeness-A Global Relation spirituality, i.e., our relationship to God, to others, to the universe around us," to which I would add our relationship to ourselves.

Maria Ranier Rilke tells us "learn to live with the questions themselves." As a spiritual seeker I have tried to live by this axiom. Thus personally, I found this book to be very meaningful, insightful and challenging. The process of raising important questions itself can be a spiritual practice which encourages us to re-examine our on-going journey and its future direction.

In writing the last essay of this book, Joan Chittister inspires us to look at the questions that have shaped our lives and reflect on how they affected us to be the person we are today. She believes it is very important for us to honor our own questions.

News for the Academy Alumnae

Dear Alumnae,

I hope each of you are being blessed with a peace filled 2010. Thanks for each of you who sent Christmas greetings, cards, donations or stopped by for a visit. I look forward to seeing many of you on

February 21, 2010 at the Open House from 2:00-4:00 for parents, families and friends. It will be a good time to see our new home and visit with classmates. For those of you who will be celebrating your **High School Reunions** this summer please put the dates of **July 17-18** on your calendars. Visit our new Alumnae page on the web for more alumnae details.

Sister Lucile

www.benethillmonastery.org



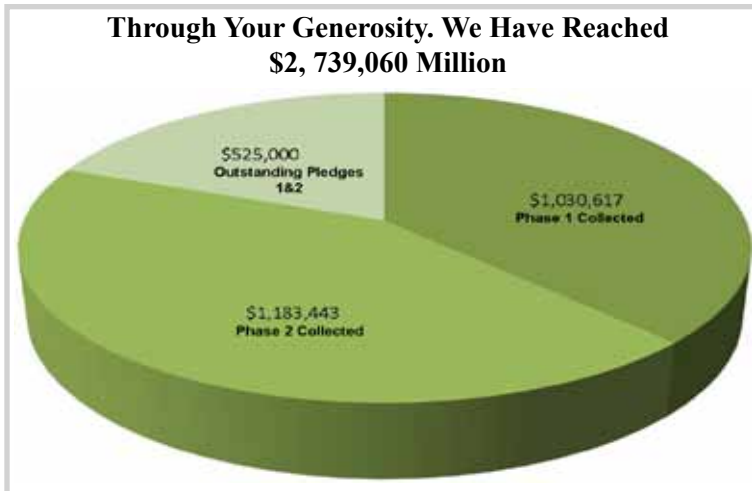
Development Office

by Rose Ann Barmann, OSB, Development Director

“We as a community at Benet Hill realize how much our own inner and outer life has been built upon the labors of others, both living and dead, and how earnestly we must exert ourselves in order to give in return as much as we have received.”

These words adapted from Albert Einstein express the sentiment of our community as we bring 2009 to a close. Many of you, our families and friends, have generously contributed to our *Capital Campaign: To Create a Benedictine Future With Us* bringing us near the initial goal of Phase II (please note the pie chart).

You are helping us to continue, in a vibrant and viable way, the important Benedictine work of creating a Sacred Place where the stranger, the student, the seeker and the guest of every age and religious faith may come to be loved, challenged to grow and accepted for who they are with respect and dignity. You are co-workers with us in building up the reign of God. Thank you and may God continue to bless you and all those you love.



Now that we are settled in our forest home we turn our attention to using our technology more effectively. As of January 2009, Benet Hill has the capability of receiving DONATIONS online.

In order to reach out to our community in a fresher more immediate way we are also starting an email group. Inspiration and Benedictine tips as well as our newsletter will be available via email. If you are interested in being included in our group, please let us know by sending an email to mkunkel@benethillmonastery.org.

Please visit our website to see all that you are helping to make happen at Benet Hill Monastery and Ministry Center. www.benethillmonastery.org

Ministries of the Monastery

Benedictine Spiritual Formation Program

by John Rodwick, Ph.D., Student BSFP, Professor Emeritus of Business Clinical/Organizational Psychologist

This past fall, I joined the Spiritual Formation Program and hopefully, next year I will take a Scripture course. It is the commitment to spiritual education which underscores Benet Hill as a beacon on a hilltop whose light fills our lives with new eyes of understanding, a revitalized heart of compassion, and a determination to live our lives fully on a journey that moves us"...towards God as the Joy of the present and the future."



Luke Konantz and John Rodwick during BSFP classroom discussion -Grand Junction

"...seek God in the daily celebration of life."

Benet Hill is ever aware of and responding to those below. Its light brings hope, joy, and most of all, laughter to those of us who have worked with and loved the sisters of this monastic order.

When my wife, Jean and I married in the Benet Hill Chapel in 1977, we celebrated our commitment with "Z" (Reginald Zeller), Ann Schaefer, Marilyn Carpenter and many other sisters, friends, and colleagues. It was our way of affirming our connection to the Benet Hill Charism and the belief that we would, in our own unique way"...seek God in the daily celebration of life." This celebration continues even to this day.

Volunteers Profile by Sr. Ana Cloughly

The Volunteer Program offers opportunities for women to experience Benedictine life with the vowed membership of Benet Hill Monastery. Individuals share our life through presence at prayer, meals, ministry and recreational activities.

Maria Plafcan lived with us as a volunteer for three months. Originally from Arkansas, Maria joined us in mid-November from St Gertrude's Monastery in Cottonwood, Idaho where she is an affiliate. She is volunteering at Benet Hill to experience another Benedictine community while she discerns her call to religious life.

Maria has an extensive background in Natural Sciences and brings to us her love for ecologically sound gardening and deep concern for the earth. She is very active in helping us in our efforts to recycle and is working out a viable method for composting in our pine forest ecosystem. She says of her experience with us, "I always feel that I receive much more than I give."



Volunteer Maria Plafcan covering the reception desk

"Benedictine spirituality says that we must continue to beg the stranger to come into our lives because in the stranger may come the only honesty and insight we can get in our plastic worlds..."

-Joan Chittister, OSB



Calendar Winter Events, classes, workshops

Contemplative Vision Program

Welcoming Prayer Workshop
Feb 27, 2010
9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Women's Centering Prayer Retreat
Mar 12-14 2010

Men's Centering Prayer Retreat
Mar 26-28, 2010

Scripture Classes open to new students immediately!

6 weeks course
beginning March 3/4, 2010
Mornings (9:15-11:15 am)
or Evenings (6:30-8:30 pm)
the **B**ook of **R**evelation
and the
Gospel of **J**ohn

Open House
Alumnae, parents, families
and friends
Feb 21, 2010
2:00 - 4:00 pm

Oblates Meeting
Feb 21, 2010
12:00 - 3:00 pm
Registration not necessary

Register for all events by
calling 719-633-0655
ext 200
additional information at
www.benethillmonastery.org

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Sign up at www.benethillmonastery.org*

Senior Days...

open to any "enlightened learner"

\$25.00 includes lunch

Friday 9:30-11:45 am

Register by calling 633-0655 ext 200

February 12, 2010 *Spirituality and Science Meet*
Register by Feb. 8 *Sister Anne Madeleine Brost*

March 12, 2010 *Pyramids, Pilgrims and People with*
Register by Mar. 8 *Linda Boyles*

April 09, 2010 *Romantic Nationalism (Patriotism)*
Register by Apr. 7 *is the Theme*
Pianist Mary Turner Gipson

...and

Renewal Day

February 27, 2010 9am- 12pm

The Fifth Gospel, The Holy Land

Presenter: Rev. Michael Butler

\$10 donation, open to all

Benet Hill Monastery

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*Meditation Retreatant participants
with Sr. Josie and Sr. Phyllis*

Retreatants are welcomed into the fullness of our community allowing the women to join the sisters in our new dining room for meals. Several of the participants were also excited to join us for Morning Prayer and for Mass on Sunday. The group was included in the community celebrations of the New Year, one of the sister's birthday and as we sang a blessing over sisters who would be traveling, which they found quite moving. Our welcome made the retreatants feel like "a community within a community". Reflecting on their experience, a participant shared, "The forest is a wonderful place to connect with nature and very conducive to meditation."



*Deacon's Retreat Day, January 16, 2010
Deacons and wives during mass said by Fr. Dunn.*



Benet Pines Retreatants by Sr. Ana Cloughly

The Retreat Center Begins New Year Welcoming Women Writers

This year began with a vibrant group of women writers from across the state.

Writing the Sacred is the first of many retreats Sandra Dorr hopes to bring to our beautiful location. Dorr decided to hold her retreat at Benet Pines after hearing about us from a Buddhist friend in Grand Junction who had attended a Zen retreat here several years ago.



*Leaders of the writer's retreat visit with
Sister Ana.*

Also taking time away for retreat throughout the month were a group from St Andrew Kim Korean Catholic Church, the Deacons from the Diocese of Colorado Springs, and a group seeking Self Realization.

For information on private, directed and group retreats contact Sr. Josie Sanchez at 719-633-0655, ext 132.