

# *Threshold*

Volume 25 ❧ Number 2 ❧ Summer 2025

A Publication of the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica



# FROM THE Prioress

## *Lessons from the Sequoia Trees*

Last September, I had the opportunity to visit Sequoia National Park in California and stand in reverence before the largest tree in the world: a sequoia named the General Sherman Tree. This tree is 275 feet tall; for me to look up at it is comparable to a mouse looking up at a person who is 6 feet tall. It would take 15 adults, arms outstretched and hands connected, to encircle the tree. General Sherman is over 2,200 years old. That means it was growing at the time of Jesus's birth, was already centuries old when St. Benedict of Nursia was born and was 450 years old when the United States was founded.

Sequoia roots are shallow but spread wide. They entangle with the roots of neighboring sequoias, forming a mesh that helps them all maintain balance and stability.

The General Sherman has been threatened by fire, drought, disease, earthquakes, high winds, blizzards, and human beings. Yet it remains majestic and powerful, commanding honor and respect.

As I stood before this massive tree, I felt small, insignificant, very young, awed, energized, and humbled. I also felt special, honored, privileged, and blessed to be surrounded by such beauty, antiquity, and magnificence.

As I gazed upon this tree, I reflected on the human giants I've encountered in my life. Topping the list are Jesus, St. Benedict, St. Scholastica, Hildegard of Bingen,

Gandhi, Oscar Romero, Mother Teresa, Pope John XXIII, and the sisters in my community. And the list went on. The "treeness" of these men and women spoke volumes to me of integrity, courage, strength, and endurance.

The image of this enormous tree invited deeper reflection into the intricate root system of our faith — our fundamental beliefs and the powerful traditions passed on to us. Our roots began with St. Benedict and St. Scholastica in the 5th century and have since spread across every continent, connecting us to one another. These roots have provided strength, support, and nourishment to the human community. They are deep, thick, and far-reaching, entwining friends, students, coworkers, donors, neighbors, relatives, and employees throughout the world.

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*“As I stood before this massive tree, I felt small, insignificant, very young, awed, energized, and humbled.”*

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Like the sequoia groves, our communities face threats — not only from natural disasters but more so from human forces such as white supremacy, nationalism, elitism, racism, the overconsumption of natural resources, war, greed, the misuse of power, hatred, violence, arrogance, and self-centeredness.



Yet because our roots are so deeply interconnected, they keep our faith strong. We can stand tall in our beliefs and uphold one another in love and prayer. Through acts of generosity, self-giving, and prayer, we form a network of inner strength, diversity, and power — a living shield that protects us from these threats. Our hope and trust in the power of God keep us strong and faithful.

We are profoundly grateful for our donors, whose names appear in this issue of *Threshold*. You have helped nourish and sustain our roots. We are proud to stand with you like the sequoia trees, our roots intertwined to form a grove that gives glory and honor to God who has created us. It is a joy to know that right in the middle of our little piece of the world, our loving God, who is bigger and more magnificent than General Sherman, is connecting us and embracing us in one great, loving hug.

*Sister Mary Elizabeth*

Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, OSB  
Prioress, Mount St. Scholastica

# Welcome to our Donor Issue!

We are grateful to all of our donors who share their time, talent, and treasure with us!



Oblates Jamie Baker and Janet Paper bake pies for the community to enjoy on the Feast of St. Benedict.



Donors at the Night of Dreams check out auction items.

## On the Cover

Sr. Helga Leija made her monastic profession during Evening Prayer in the Choir Chapel on March 25, 2025.

# Threshold

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# Sister Helga Leija Makes Her Monastic Profession

On March 25, 2025, Sister Helga Leija stood before the community at Vespers and made her monastic profession of obedience, fidelity to the monastic way of life (*conversatio*), and stability, thus becoming the newest sister of Mount St. Scholastica.

Sister Helga began religious life as a member of an apostolic community, the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament of Corpus Christi, Texas. After 15 years, she began discerning a call to a different way of living religious life in a more contemplative setting. Her exploration eventually led her to the Mount in July 2021, and two months later she entered into a formal transfer process.

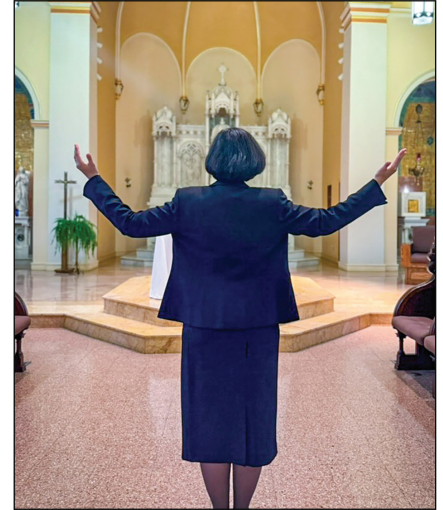


*Sister Helga removes the ring of her former community as the prioress, Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, places the ring worn by the sisters of Mount St. Scholastica on Sister Helga's finger.*

As she became immersed in a new culture, landscape, and charism, Sister Helga struggled at first with the Benedictine practice of stability — the commitment to remain in one place, with one community, through all its trials and joys. Yet she chose to remain and eventually learned that stability can become a path to grace and that the discomfort of the ordinary can be transforming. She said, “My monastic community slowly began to transform before my eyes and heart. Their same faces and voices, over time, became instruments of God’s presence, and I realized that stability was not about doing the same thing every day in the same place for life, but about trusting that God is present in those faces, in those things we do, in this place we live.”

Sister Helga gained a grounding in Benedictine life by studying the Rule of St. Benedict, the history

of the Mount, monastic history, the spirituality of the desert mothers and fathers, and monastic practices and vows in classes conducted by Sisters Patricia Gamgort, Cecilia Olson, and Judith Sutera. She also found it very helpful to attend online meetings with other sisters transferring to Benedictine communities. They were assisted in their exploration of grief, change, transition, letting go, and integration by Sr. Anne-Louise Nadeau, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur who is a transfer specialist.



*Sister Helga chants the “Suscipe” prayer (“Receive me, O Lord, as you have promised that I may live; disappoint me not in my hope”).*



*Sister Helga is covered with a pall as a sign of her mystical burial with Christ and rising to a new life.*

Along the way, Sister Helga, who has a bachelor’s degree in translation studies, began to work part time for “Global Sisters Report” (a division of the *National Catholic Reporter*) as a freelance translator and sister liaison. She now works there full time as Columns Editor, helping sisters from around the world tell their stories of how they live a consecrated life and

serve others through their ministries. At the Mount, Sister Helga serves as a member of the schola, a small liturgical choir; as a Board member of Keeler Women's Center; and as a companion for Sister Elaine Gregory, who lives in Dooley Center. She also is pursuing an online Certificate in Benedictine Spirituality through Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota.

Sister Helga says that through her years of discernment and transition from an apostolic to a Benedictine community, "I am learning to remain true to myself and to God's call for my life." We at the Mount are grateful that this call led her to seek God with us in the "school of the Lord's service" that is our Benedictine life.

## *Sisters Host BC Board Members and Alumni*

The second weekend in June was a time to reconnect with former students and welcome Board and Cabinet members of Benedictine College (BC) to the Mount.

On June 12, 2025, sisters shared Evening Prayer and supper with 23 guests who serve as BC Board and Cabinet members, along with some of their spouses. Sr. Mary Elizabeth Schweiger provided an overview of the Mount's history, and Sisters Elaine Fischer, Suzanne Fitzmaurice, Anne Shepard, and Barbara Smith provided tours of the monastery, chapels, St. Cecilia's, Sophia Spirituality Center, and the grounds. Some of the guests were visiting the Mount for the first time and expressed their appreciation for the hospitality of the sisters and the beauty of our prayer and monastic environment.



*Sister Suzanne Fitzmaurice (front left) and Sister Elaine Fischer (driving) take the BC Board and Cabinet members (including President Stephen Minnis and his wife Amy, front right) on a tour of the Mount grounds.*

enjoyed catching up with their former teachers and classmates, and Sr. Barbara McCracken offered a tour of the monastery.

The sisters also invited alumni to attend Mass in St. Scholastica Chapel on Sunday, July 15, in memory of deceased alums and in grateful remembrance of the ways God has blessed us through our study, prayer, and enduring friendships at MSSC, SBC, and BC.



*Alumni visit with Sister Deborah Peters at an ice cream social hosted by the Mount.*

As part of the BC Alumni Reunion, the Mount hosted an ice cream social on Saturday, July 14. Graduates of Mount St. Scholastica College (MSSC), St. Benedict's College (SBC), and BC



*BC Board and Cabinet members and their spouses enjoy dinner with the sisters.*

*Dear Friends,*

You are truly a gift to our community! Some of you give of your time to volunteer at the Mount, Sophia Center, and Keeler Women's Center so we can keep our services to others going smoothly. Your financial donations help us in so many ways to meet the needs of our community and our ministries. Your friendship is enriching and encouraging to us as we journey with you to bring Christ's peace and joy to our world.

This summer we are replacing the roof on our monastery, and your generous gifts are helping us pay the bills for this project. The roof was over 25 years old, and the new one will last for 50 years, so this is a long-term investment. Your donations help us keep our buildings and grounds in good repair. Updates and repairs are a big part of our stewardship of our facilities.

Your thoughtfulness and generosity also help us as we continue to adjust and plan for our future as a smaller community. Your support is essential to our ministry of hospitality to our guests. We know we need friends and partners like you to maintain our community life of prayer and service.

Prayer is the best way we can thank you for your kindness to us. You are remembered each Wednesday as we pray for our relatives, friends, and benefactors and offer our Eucharist for all of you. To request prayers, contact me at 913-360-6215, at [patterson@mountosb.org](mailto:patterson@mountosb.org), or via our web site at <https://www.mountosb.org/prayer/prayer-requests/>.

God bless each of you.



Mary Agnes Patterson, OSB  
Director of Development

## *The Mount Legacy Society*

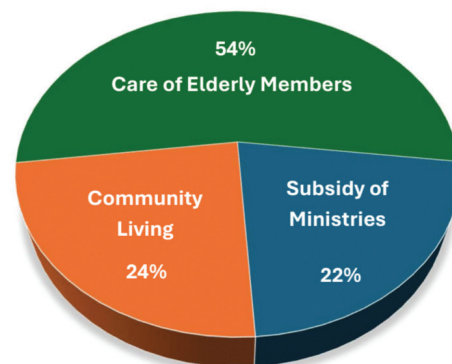
The Mount Legacy Society recognizes donors who have remembered the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica as beneficiary of a planned gift. It is a privilege and honor for the sisters to be named as a beneficiary in your gift planning. Thank you for considering such a gift. For information, I invite you to contact:

Sister Mary Agnes Patterson  
Director of Development  
913-360-6215  
[patterson@mountosb.org](mailto:patterson@mountosb.org).

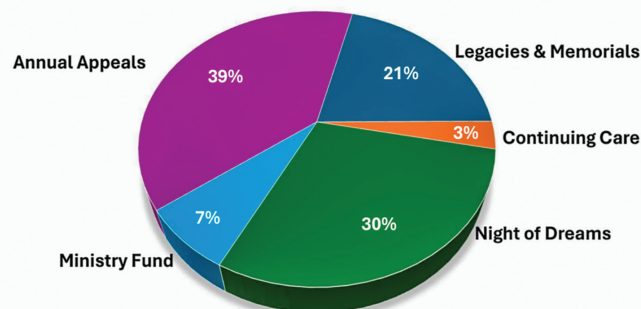
The following donors are new to the Mount Legacy Society since our last issue of *Threshold*.

Father Earl Dekatt†  
Kathy England†

### Uses of Donations 2024



### Donation Sources 2024 Total \$2,702,965



**After 20 years of faithful and fruitful service, Sister Mary Agnes will be stepping down from leadership of the Mount's development department. A public search for a new director will begin soon.**



# Thank you to our generous donors

On the following pages are names of persons who made a donation to Mount St. Scholastica during the 2024 calendar year. **Bolded names** indicate donors who are members of the Mount Legacy Society. These donors have remembered the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica in their wills or estate plans. Thank you for your generous support!



We have removed the names of our donors to protect their privacy.

# Mount Welcomes New Oblates

By Faye Miller, Oblate Coordinator

A group of five lay persons brought many gifts to Mount St. Scholastica when they made their oblation on April 26, 2025. The new oblates come from different faith backgrounds and careers, including teaching, museum management, senior care, and business. Additionally, Jamie Baker transferred her oblation from Mt. Michael Abbey in Elkhorn, Nebraska, to the Mount after she and her husband moved to Liberty, Missouri, to be closer to family.

Jamie says she has always felt called to help others. She has done that professionally by answering the call to be a teacher of both the young and of elders. Jamie and her husband, Lance, have two daughters and one granddaughter, with whom they are close. Jamie has a graduate degree in gerontology and brings a never-ending smile to any event in which she participates. She is a member of the Trinity oblate deanery.

The Rite of Oblation was a special event for Jana Gowan of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Jana's mother and a life-long friend from Washington, D.C., attended the event, along with a couple of surprise guests, her pastor and his wife from Jana's parish in Tulsa. Jana is a 2023 Souljourners graduate and says she has felt God calling her to a deeper relationship since she first came to the Mount in 2019. Jana is active in her Episcopal parish and works for the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa.



*The oblate class of 2025 with their directors and the prioress. Bottom row, L-R: Sister Therese Elias, Janet Paper, Jennifer Hausman, Jana Gowan, and Sister Barbara Conroy. Top row, L-R: Sister Jennifer Halling, Jamie Baker, Dorothy Williams, Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, and Tom Weis.*

A native of St. Joseph, Missouri, Jennifer Hausman is a member of the oblate deanery in her hometown. Having been raised in a faith-filled home, Jennifer values her Catholic faith. Giving back to others is part of her work as an elementary school teacher and as a member of her parish. Jennifer's mother was an oblate of the Mount, and it was through her example that Jennifer started her own journey in learning about the Rule of St. Benedict and deepening her faith in God. Jennifer and her husband, Dave, have a 12-year-old daughter.



*Top row: Jamie Baker (left) and Janet Paper (left middle) sign their oblation document on the Gospel book. Jana Gowan (right middle) receives a hug from the prioress, Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, and Jennifer Hausman (right) proclaims her oblation. Bottom row: Tom Weis (left) and Dorothy Williams (right) receive their medal from the prioress.*

Janet Paper has been a volunteer at the Mount for several years. She often is seen either covered in flour in the bake house or helping Sr. Loretta McGuire in the garden. Janet, a professor of biology at Benedictine College, has a deep passion for the earth and for Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. She is eager to learn from the sisters how to apply the Rule to living with others and honoring creation. Janet is a native of Iowa, and many of her family members came to support her at her oblation.

Tom Weis is a member of the Atchison deanery. He and his wife, Mary Muldoon, who made her oblation in 2024, started their oblate journey in the 1990s. Tom is grateful that after several job-related moves and years of raising three children, they have renewed their connection to the Mount. Tom and Mary now live in Colorado, where Tom is a consulting geophysicist. Tom appreciates the support and joyful spirit of the sisters and the oblate community in the midst of these divisive times. He and Mary rarely miss an oblate meeting on Zoom.



Dorothy Williams is a familiar face at Keeler Women's Center, where she is a volunteer and attends meetings of the Keeler oblate deanery. Her friend and now fellow oblate, Deb Carmody, encouraged her to consider oblation. Dorothy enjoys *lectio divina* and admires the Benedictine approach to living in the world. Dorothy is a physical therapist and currently makes home visits to assess safety issues for clients. She lives in Shawnee, Kansas, with her husband, Tony. They have two children and one grandchild.

The Mount is blessed to welcome these faith-filled oblates to our community!

## Meet our New Oblate Coordinator

As the oblate program at the Mount continues to grow, we discerned the need for an oblate coordinator to manage our formation program and events such as the Rite of Oblation and Oblate Renewal Day. Fortunately, Faye Miller decided to retire from her job as a nurse at the beginning of 2025 and is an ideal fit for this new position.

Faye has a long association with the Mount. She was taught by the sisters from grade school through college and served as director of admissions at Mount St. Scholastica Academy from 1994-2003. She currently is a member of the Mount Development Board. Faye became an oblate in 2016 and is a member of the Atchison oblate deanery.

Faye says, "I'm eager to share the charism of the sisters with people of all faiths who, like the sisters, are seeking God and wish to serve others." Faye is particularly interested in introducing college students to the Benedictine way of life and the Mount oblate program.

An enthusiastic environmentalist, Faye has facilitated a *Laudato Si'* study group for the oblates, along with discussions of the books *Braiding Sweetgrass* and *Serviceberry* by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Faye also has the Benedictine trait of love of learning and is pursuing an online 15-hour certificate in Benedictine Spirituality through Saint John's School of Theology in Collegeville, Minnesota.

Persons with a connection to the Mount who are interested in learning more about our oblate program can contact Faye at [femiller@mountosb.org](mailto:femiller@mountosb.org) for further information.



*Thank you to our generous donors*

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We have removed the names of our donors to protect their privacy.

## *Keeler Women's Center Honors Its Volunteers*

Every year, the Keeler Women's Center (KWC) volunteer recognition celebration is held at local places rooted in the history of the Kansas City metro area. On Friday, April 4, 2025, KWC celebrated more than 65 volunteers and community partners at the National Agricultural Center and Hall of Fame in Bonner Springs, Kansas. Volunteers enjoyed visiting Farm Town USA buildings depicting pioneer life. The exhibition includes a hatchery, blacksmith shop, and general store, as well as a replica of an 1890s home and the one-room Island Creek school house, which was built in 1917.

KWC is blessed with professional and community volunteers and partnerships with local community organizations. Many sisters of the Mount, along with several Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, offer spiritual direction, retreats, and classes at KWC. Other programs, including ESL tutoring, are offered by Mount oblates; others assist with weekly receptionist work. We are grateful for everyone's contributions!



*L-R: Sister Maria Nguyen, Brenda Mortell, Dr. Chiquita Miller, Sister Bridget Dickason, Lynnette Booker, and Sabrina Boyd.*



We have removed the names of  
our donors to protect their privacy.

# Bilingual Retreatants Enjoy Benedictine Hospitality

As soon as the 50 attendees of a Bilingual Women's Day retreat arrived at Sophia Center on April 27 and were met with coffee and Sister Loretta McGuire's homemade cinnamon rolls, they knew they were going to have a special day.

Past retreatants expressed a desire to learn more about the lives of the Mount sisters, so the day was designed to allow time for visiting and exploration of the sisters' prayer and ministries.



*Sisters Elaine Fischer (right front) and Patricia Seipel (center) take the retreatants on a tour of the grounds, including the beehives.*

The Sunday Mass in St. Scholastica Chapel featured music, prayers, and readings in both English and Spanish, and Sister Helga Leija read a translation of Fr. Meinrad Miller's homily in Spanish. The retreatants were touched to receive a blessing from the sisters at the end of the Mass.

Retreatants, most of whom were from the Kansas City region, were then divided into three groups. Throughout the afternoon they enjoyed the following activities:

- Sharing dinner with sisters in the monastery dining room

- Attending a talk by Sister Suzanne Fitzmaurice about prayer and the symbolism of the windows in the Choir Chapel
- Exploring displays with information about vocations, oblates, Benedictines for Peace, and Keeler Women's Center
- Learning about Sister Barbara Smith's efforts to bring clean water to developing countries through her work with the organization Water by Women
- Taking a tour of the grounds and learning about beekeeping from Sisters Elaine Fischer and Patricia Seipel
- Visiting the gift shop

The retreat ended with a closing prayer in the Choir Chapel.

The sisters were grateful for the opportunity to welcome this group of extraordinary women to the monastery, learn about their lives, and share our Benedictine prayer and heritage with them. We also appreciated the assistance of Karla Melgar from the Archdiocesan Office of Hispanic Ministry and Sophia staff member Mary Kay Whitacre, who coordinated the event, along with numerous oblates and Souljourners graduates who served as translators and helped provide hospitality to our bilingual guests.



*Retreatants participate in Mass.*



# Sisters Honor Employees with Service Awards

On May 29, 2025, the Mount sisters hosted a picnic to thank care providers and administrators at Dooley Center and employees of the monastery for their hard work on our behalf.

This annual gathering has become a treasured time for employees to bring their spouses and children to see their workplace and spend time with the sisters. After a welcome by the prioress and a leisurely meal of favorite picnic foods, recipients of service awards were introduced, with details about their unique strengths and the ways they contribute to the well-being of the sisters and our guests.



*Renee Porter receives an award for 10 years of service from Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger.*

Sister Molly Brockwell, who organized the event, noted that employees who received five-year service awards this year are a special group because they were hired at the very beginning of the COVID pandemic. Their perseverance and dedication during that challenging time are especially notable. This group included eight employees from Dooley Center: Heather Amos, Melany Blevins, Melissa Coates, Brent Kelley, Tanya Mawhinney, Brandy Schmelzle, Cassandra Strube, and Jodie Thompson. Donna Coleman from Sophia Spirituality Center and Elisha Quintois from our housekeeping department also were honored.

A ten-year service award was presented to Renee Porter, administrator of Dooley Center, who also was commended for her devoted and steady leadership during the trying years of the pandemic.

At the conclusion of the evening, Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger thanked all the employees for the many ways they serve us, and the sisters gave them a blessing.

## *Brazilian Monks Visit the Mount*

On July 19, 2025, the Mount sisters enjoyed a visit from four Benedictine monks from Mosteiro São Jose (St. Joseph Monastery) in Mineiros, Goias, Brazil, which is part of the monastic community of St. Benedict's Abbey. These monks are colleagues of the Brazilian sisters in the Mount's daughterhouse in Mineiros. After receiving a tour of the monastery and grounds, the monks joined us for dinner. Bishop Joaquin Carlos Carvalho, now serving as the seventh bishop of the Diocese of Jataí, Brazil, spoke to the sisters with the help of an interpreter, Sister Joana Dalva Alves Mendes, SSJ. The other monks — Father Thiago, Brother Domingo, and Brother Romario — were introduced and spoke a few words. The sisters then gave them a blessing, and they blessed us in turn.



*The monks and their translator receive a blessing from the sisters.*

On July 21, many of the Mount sisters attended a dinner hosted by the Atchison Serra Club where the Brazilian monks shared photos and stories about their ministries in Mineiros. Sisters Elaine Gregory and Grace Malaney, who spent years working at our daughterhouse in Mineiros and still speak Portuguese, particularly enjoyed visiting with the monks and sharing memories of their time in Brazil.

*Thank you to our generous donors*

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our donors to protect their privacy.



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## *Donors Help Us Replace Our Monastery Roof*

We are grateful to our donors who have contributed funds to replace the roof of our monastery and Choir Chapel. This six-month project, which began in March 2025, is being performed by Seaman-Schuske Metalworks of St. Joseph, Missouri. The roof was last replaced in 1999. Thanks to new technology, more durable and flexible 50-year shingles are now available, so we shouldn't have to replace the roof again until 2075!

Many sisters have watched, heart in mouth, as workers have nimbly scrambled over the roof of our four-story buildings while carrying heavy materials in the summer heat. These workers, along with other people whose jobs can be dangerous, have been in our prayers.





# Peace and Justice Activities at the Mount

Motivated by Jesus' call to love our neighbor and by the Benedictine value of hospitality, Mount sisters have been actively advocating for the needs of the poor and immigrants, educating groups about how to address justice issues, and promoting ethical investing practices.

## Billboard Reminds Travelers to Feed the Hungry

During Lent, the Mount purchased a space on an electronic billboard featuring the message "I was hungry and you gave me food" with Jesus' signature. The billboard included a photo of an African child holding a USAID food packet. Located on highway I-29 just minutes from the KCI airport, the billboard message was shown for 8 seconds every minute from March 13 through April 24, 2025.

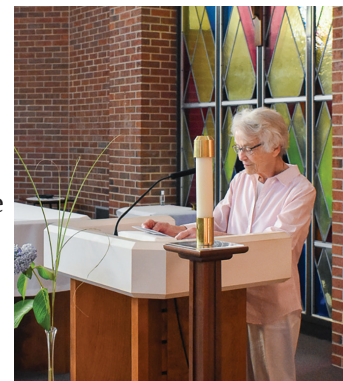
## Sisters Address Missouri River Minister Group

Sister Anne Shepard gave a presentation on "Who Is My Neighbor?" at the Missouri River Minister Annual Fellowship Dinner at Trinity Episcopal Church in Atchison on March 26, 2025. She explained why immigration is an important pro-

life issue for Mount sisters and detailed the many ways our community has ministered to immigrants since 1863, when we were asked to come to Atchison to teach immigrant children. She noted that the gospel story of the Good Samaritan, the focus on hospitality in the Rule of St. Benedict, and the principles of Catholic/Christian social justice fuel our passion for this topic. Sister Anne and Sister Barbara McCracken then led a discussion on what we can do to care for our neighbors.

## Prayer Services Focus on Social Justice Concerns

Once a week during the 2025 Lenten season, Sisters Jennifer Halling and Micaela Randolph planned and led a 15-minute prayer service that was live-streamed on the Mount Facebook page. Each service featured a specific social justice concern: care of the poor, the needs of refugees and immigrants, world peace, healing for the physically and mentally ill, stewardship of the earth, and upholding human dignity.



## Sister Barbara McCracken Speaks Out

The Kansas Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, which sponsors a peace lecture each year, invited Sister Barbara McCracken to discuss the spiritual aspects of peacemaking at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, on March 27, 2025.

Sr. Barbara also was a speaker at the Free State Rally on April 27, 2025, in Thompson Park, located in Overland Park, Kansas. At both events, Sister Barbara spoke about principles of nonviolence, the Gospel call to care for the poor, and Jesus' instruction to love our neighbor.



## Socially Conscious Investing Gains Media Attention

A six-minute interview with Sisters Rose Marie Stallbaumer and Barbara McCracken conducted by Elizabeth Schulze appeared on *ABC Evening News* on April 11, 2025. The feature focused on the Mount's use of socially conscious investing as a tool to promote human rights and protection of the

environment. The ABC television station KQ2 News in St. Joseph, Missouri, also interviewed Sisters Rose Marie and Barbara about this topic for a two-minute segment that aired on April 27, 2025 (<https://youtu.be/1kQ0q97ZDYI?si=IyOUEiXsLm4CgoPa>). The *Kansas City Star* newspaper interviewed Sr. Barbara about her history of social justice activism and work in the area of socially conscious investing for a story that appeared on May 21, 2025 (see <https://www.kansascity.com/news/local/article306747746.html>).

## Phone Campaign Advocates for the Poor

Sisters have been using the 5 Calls app to contact their representatives and senators regarding cuts to Medicaid coverage, humane treatment of immigrants, reduction of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) aid, and other issues affecting the lives of poor people in the United States. Information about this advocacy tool can be found at <https://5calls.org/>.

# Statement Regarding Immigration

*The sisters of Mount St. Scholastica endorse the following statement by the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses:*

In the spirit of the Gospel and the inspiration of St. Benedict we, as members of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses (CBP), representing more than 1100 sisters, commit ourselves to Christ-like hospitality. Therefore, we call upon our leaders, especially governors, state legislators, members of the United States Congress, and our president to reconsider proposed immigration policies and to work towards solutions that uphold the dignity and rights of all people. We urge them to create pathways to citizenship for immigrants, provide humane treatment for those in detention, and ensure that immigrant families are not torn apart. In addition, we commit ourselves to work with other organizations who are advocating and caring for migrant peoples.

As Benedictine sisters, we are inspired by the life and teachings of St. Benedict. In the sixth century time when he lived, travelers and pilgrims were often met with violence on the road and sought refuge in his monasteries. Benedict was inspired by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to receive all who came seeking refuge. He modeled his life on that of Christ who received the poor, the lame, the outcast, and the stranger.

St. Benedict quoted Jesus who said, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35). For centuries, men and women have continued to be inspired by St. Benedict's example of Christ-like hospitality and his teaching that all people who present themselves are to be received as Christ. May we and all people, in our time, do the same.

*Thank you to our generous donors*

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We have removed the names of  
our donors to protect their privacy.



*Sisters Susan Barber (left) and Patricia Seipel organized a Bavarian brunch to celebrate the Feast of St. Walburga.*



*Donors enjoy visiting at the Night of Dreams  
before the live auction begins.*



We have removed the names of  
our donors to protect their privacy.

# Twelve New Spiritual Directors Graduate from Souljourners

Twelve Souljourners students celebrated three years of study, skill building, practicum work, and fellowship at their graduation ceremony on July 12. After reflecting on their time together at a mini-retreat on July 11 and sharing a final supper together, the students welcomed family and friends to St. Scholastica Chapel the next day to witness and celebrate their graduation.

During the ceremony, the graduates shared their understanding of spiritual direction, were anointed for this new ministry, received their certificate, and were blessed by the Mount sisters and by their guests. A joyful reception at Sophia Spirituality Center followed, where the graduates acknowledged the contributions and guidance of each member of the Souljourners staff and gave them a farewell gift.

Graduate Margaret Harris commented, "Souljourners has been one of those deeply transformative experiences of life for me and for others. We found that God's Spirit met our own spirits and hearts and infused us with new knowledge, deeper understanding, practical skills, and new ways to extend God's love to others. There are many spiritual



2025 Souljourners graduates, front row, L-R: Mary Andrews, Melea White, Diane O'Brien, Jennifer Jones, Dana Preusch, Paula Jean Adair; back row, L-R: Margaret Harris, Mark Lepper, Heather Coates, Jennifer Halling, OSB, Susan Wade, and Glenda Johnson.

direction programs available today, but one of the great strengths of this program is that it is infused with Benedictine spirit and values. As one of our mentors said — and I have come to know its truth in real practice — 'spiritual direction is changing the world, one person at a time.'"

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# Sisters Judith and Elizabeth Present Retreats in Australia

“The trip of a lifetime” was the way Sisters Elizabeth Carrillo and Judith Sutera described the “preaching tour” of Australia they took in February and March of 2025. They were invited by a consortium of Benedictine communities in that country to give their week-long annual community retreats and a series of one-day workshops for the public.

The first stop was with the Benedictine nuns of Jamberoo Abbey, where Sisters Judith and Elizabeth gave a workshop and the nuns’ retreat. After that, they presented three retreats and workshops for the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St. Benedict, an active congregation with regional centers in the Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne areas. Also on their schedule was a workshop for the monks at the Cistercian abbey in Tarrawarra along with their oblates and other attendees.

For the retreats, Sister Judith, whose expertise is in monastic theology, addressed a Benedictine value; and Sister Elizabeth, whose degree is in theology and the environment, invited participants to extend their understanding of the value into their relationship with all of creation. The workshops explored the early monastic foundations of engagement with creation and how Benedictine spirituality can be an inspiration



*Sisters Elizabeth and Judith enjoy the sights of Sydney Harbor.*

for today. In the days between the events, their hosts had arranged a number of opportunities for rest and sightseeing, including the Southern Ocean and the Blue Mountains.

In addition to meeting so many interesting people and seeing places and creatures that are so different from those in the United States (as well as enjoying summer there in the middle of Atchison’s winter), a high point for Sister Judith was reuniting with some of the sisters with whom she had studied in graduate school or who had previously visited the Mount. “I’ve been blessed to be able to study the Rule and share with so many different communities,” she said.

Sister Elizabeth was especially impressed by the Good Samaritans’ Wivenhoe Conservation Area and said she hoped to learn more about and support the good work being done in Australia’s Benedictine communities in the areas of eco-spirituality and caring for creation. “I was inspired learning about the environmental initiatives and the central place that ecological conversion has for the Good Samaritan Sisters and for many Australian institutions,” she said.



*Oblates listen to a presentation at Jamberoo Abbey.*

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# BC Students Present Discovery Day Projects



*Benedictine College students present their project findings to the sisters.*

The Mount's Wangari Committee, which promotes care of the earth, provided grants for two 2025 Benedictine College (BC) Discovery Day projects. The grants support research related to stewardship, sustainability, women's equality, and environmental justice. Students presented a report on their projects to the sisters on May 1, 2025.

Sophia Valdivia and Erica Willard investigated how Esp8, EspK, and EspJ mediate mycobacterial virulence. The goal of this project was to study the secretion mechanism of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, a bacterium responsible for tuberculosis (TB). Insights from this study could help facilitate the development of more targeted antibiotics and create a less expensive TB vaccine for people in countries where access to affordable medical care is limited.

Jessica Mannella, Tess Scheske, and Anna Wingebermuehle (pictured above, L-R) explored the effect of pH on pyrethrum production in *Chrysanthemum cinerariifolium*. Pyrethrins are pesticides found naturally in some chrysanthemum flowers. This project looked at the ability of *C. cinerariifolium* to produce pyrethrum when it is treated with different types of fertilizers. Increased potency of pyrethrins could reduce the use of synthetic insecticides, which are harmful to the environment.

Two BC student volunteers, Abigaile Hygema and Louie Roth, prepared a poster for Discovery Day that explored the annual savings the Mount achieves through its sustainability practices. They presented their poster to the sisters on May 7, 2025. Abigaile and Louie gathered information about the Mount's use of solar panels and hybrid cars, beekeeping and gardening activities, bulk bread baking, in-house clothing exchange, and use of volunteer labor. They determined that the Mount saves close to \$40,000 per year through these efforts. Abigaile noted, "We were surprised how much was saved just by doing little things."

# Monastery News and Notes

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## *Annual Retreat Focuses on Liturgy and the Rule*



*Fr. Godfrey Mullen speaks at our annual retreat.*

The topic of the Mount's annual retreat from March 10 to 15, 2025, was "Liturgy and the Rule: Our Life and Our Hope." The retreat director was Fr. Godfrey Mullen, OSB, from Saint Meinrad Archabbey in St. Meinrad, Indiana. Fr. Godfrey linked aspects of the Mass to our Benedictine way of life. He also provided meditations on different aspects of the Mass, including the sign of the cross, the Penitential Act, the Glory to God prayer, the act of listening to the Word of God and interpreting it, the Offertory Rite, the Eucharistic Prayer, Communion, and being sent forth in peace. Sister Cecilia Olson, chairperson of the Ongoing Formation Committee, facilitated the retreat.

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## *Wangari Committee Sponsors Clean-up and Nature Meditation Day*

The Wangari Committee organized a clean-up and nature meditation day on April 12, 2025, followed by a picnic lunch at the gazebo prepared by Sister Alberta Hermann.

After an opening prayer led by Sr. Helen Mueeting, participants tackled various projects. Sisters Rosann Eckart, Delores Dolezal, and Rose Marie Stallbaumer spruced up the circle area in front of the monastery. Sister Jennifer Halling raked leaves and weeded near the Fatima statue and black raspberry patch, and Sisters Mary Agnes Patterson, Rita Claire Judge, and Sharon Hamsa cleaned up Mary's Garden in Dooley Center. Sisters Elaine Fischer, Helen Mueeting, Barbara McCracken, Barbara Smith, and postulant Katie Lee collected sticks and tree branches that had been brought down by spring winds. They were assisted by oblate Janet Paper and volunteer Mary Wheeler.

Another component of the day was an inside nature meditation led by Sister Elizabeth Carrillo for Sisters Rosemary Bertels, Patricia Gamgort, Thomasita Homan, Mary Margaret Kean, Sylvia Kenkel, Barbara Ann Mayer, Cecilia Olson, Angela Ostermann, Deborah Peters, Martha Schweiger, and Anne Shepard.



*Sisters Patricia Gamgort, Elizabeth Carrillo, and Barbara Smith pray before they work.*



*Oblate Janet Paper rakes in the garden.*

## *Sisters Attend Mass and Dinner with Archbishop Shawn McKnight*



*Sisters from the Mount and other communities attend Mass with Archbishop Shawn McKnight as the presider.*

On June 5, 2025, the monks of St. Benedict's Abbey hosted Mount sisters and members of other archdiocesan religious communities for a Mass with the new archbishop of the Kansas City, Kansas, Archdiocese, Shawn McKnight. Dinner followed at Ferrell Hall at Benedictine College. All the religious communities present were invited to offer a brief overview of their community's history and ministerial focus. Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger described the presence and ministries of Mount St. Scholastica in the Archdiocese and beyond for the past 162 years.

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## *Sisters Attend Monastic Congregation Pre-Chapter Meeting*

Mount St. Scholastica is a member of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica, a group of 17 Benedictine women's monasteries in 14 states and Mexico that share governance responsibilities and resources. Delegates from each monastery meet in person every four years for a chapter meeting. An online pre-chapter meeting also is held.

Sisters Jennifer Halling, Mary Rardin, and Marcia Ziska were elected as delegates from the Mount for the 2026 Chapter meeting in Baltimore, Maryland. They attended the pre-chapter meeting June 23-25, 2025, along with Congregation Councilor Elaine Fischer and Prioress Mary Elizabeth Schweiger. Presenters were Christina Cassotis, chief executive officer of Pittsburgh International Airport, who spoke about being a "change agent"; Sisters Julia Marie Roy, Tonette Sperando, Sue Fazzini, and Kimberly Porter, who presented "Our Benedictine Playbook"; Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB, who described her ministries in Eagle Pass, Texas, and the vicinity; and Sister Carmel Posa, SGS, who provided insights into Chapter 3 of the Rule of St. Benedict, "Summoning the Community for Counsel." Participants discussed challenges they are facing in their communities and worked together to set an agenda for the 2026 chapter meeting.



*L-R: Sisters Marcia Ziska, Mary Rardin, and Jennifer Halling*

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Sister Suzanne Fitzmaurice, OSB SEPT. 5-6

**DREAMS: OUR OWN PERSONAL PARABLES**  
Bernadette Graves SEPT. 12-13

**ENCUENTRO CON DIOS A TRAVÉS DEL ARTE (ART RETREAT IN SPANISH)**  
Helga Leija, OSB SEPT. 24

**SACRED ELEMENTS: ENCOUNTERING GOD IN WIND, WATER, FIRE & EARTH**  
Sister Elizabeth Carrillo, OSB SEPT. 26-27

**LIVING WITH GRIEF DURING THE HOLIDAYS (ZOOM)**  
Mary Kay Whitacre NOV. 1

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## *Fr. Meinrad Miller Is Appointed Chaplain at the Mount*

Fr. Meinrad Miller first met the sisters of Mount St. Scholastica when he entered Benedictine College (BC) in 1984 and became the prayer partner of Sister Corona Kaiser. Forty-one years later, he has received a new assignment as chaplain at the Mount, where he will celebrate Mass in St. Lucy Chapel Monday through Friday, along with many of our Feast Day and Sunday Masses in the Choir Chapel.

After he entered St. Benedict's Abbey in 1985, graduated from BC in 1989, and attended St. Vincent Seminary in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, Fr. Meinrad was ordained in 1994. In the past he has been a chaplain at BC and has served as vocations director, novice master, choir master, and organist at the Abbey. In addition to being chaplain at the Mount, Fr. Meinrad will continue to be chaplain at Valley Hope, a drug and alcohol rehab facility in Atchison, and to teach Benedictine spirituality at BC, where he has been an instructor since 1996.

Fr. Meinrad said, "The sisters were instrumental in the development of my vocation, so it's exciting to be back with them."



*Fr. Meinrad Miller, the Mount's new chaplain, with Sister Rosann Eckart, who is taking on the role of sacristan for weekday Masses in St. Lucy Chapel.*



*Sister Micaela Randolph sits with a spiritual directee at Sophia Center.*



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*Florence and Alan Salisbury feed the chickens at the Mount.*



*Keeler Women's Center class for knitting and crocheting led by E.J. Garden (front left). Hattie Major (front center) teaches left-handed people one-on-one.*



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# Institutional & Corporate Donors

*We are grateful to the businesses and institutions that made a donation of money, goods or services in 2024.*



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# Donations in Recognition

*We are grateful to donors who have chosen to honor living persons or occasions by making a donation to the Mount. The following are those who have been recognized by their loved ones in 2024.*



*L-R: Sister Rita Killackey, Florence Konrad Salisbury, and Sister Anne Shepard*



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*Sisters shuck the first seven bushels of corn of the season.*



## Donations in Memoriam

*We are grateful to those who made a donation to the Mount in 2024 in memory of the following deceased loved ones whom we have remembered in our prayers.*



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*Above left: Karin and John Hosler volunteer their time to wash dishes in the kitchen.*

*Above: Sisters Loretta McGuire, Elaine Fischer, and Micaela Randolph, Kristen Carrigan, and Sister Rosann Eckart display baskets for the Night of Dreams.*

*Left: Sisters attend Midday Prayer in St. Lucy Chapel.*



*May the souls of the faithful departed*

REST IN PEACE



## Sister Frances Yarc

*December 30 1927 – March 11, 2025*

Sister Frances was a person who said little but saw much with the eye of an artist. Her life began in Kansas City, Kansas, where she had to leave high school after only a year and a half to care for her mother. Although her education was delayed, she earned a teaching degree after she entered the monastery in 1946. She found a new calling after 22 years in classrooms in Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska, first becoming a practical nurse and then a registered nurse. She brought quiet, attentive service to patients at Providence Hospital, sisters in the Mount infirmary, and those for whom she provided home health care. At the same time, her voice on canvas was loud and clear. She created colorful landscapes and still-life oil paintings, but she excelled at more abstract works that were displayed at local art fairs and won her several awards. The quiet depth of these paintings, especially those reminiscent of a night sky, were a reflection of her own peaceful presence in the world.



## *Oblate Jan Whelan* ✠

*By Oblate Becky Chamberlain and the Julian Oblate Deanery*

Our beloved oblate sister, Jan Whelan, died on December 27, 2024. Her funeral was held on April 26, 2025.

Jan was such an activist! She went on four medical mission trips to Haiti, and after she retired, she volunteered at a women’s shelter, visited St. Luke’s hospice patients in their homes, taught adults how to read through Literacy KC, and helped feed the hungry through the Southern Platte Emergency Assistance Center.

Jan is now home with her beloved Ed —Rev. Edgar J. Whelan — her partner and soulmate. And she is home in the best sense of that word with Jesus,

whom she served and loved her entire life as an Episcopal deacon, a registered nurse, a partner and pastor’s wife, an oblate of Mount St. Scholastica, and a faithful prayer warrior who prayed for so many right up to the end of her life. Jan had absolute trust in Jesus and longed to be with God and with Ed. Her deep spirituality — through transitions such as her husband’s death in 2022, giving up their home and possessions, and her journey with cancer and hospice — was an inspiration to all of us.

We miss Jan so very much. Her courage, faithfulness, and loving attitude modeled for each of us what Homegoing is all about — a joyful reunion that will last through all eternity. Thanks be to God for her life and witness!



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