

Threshold

Volume 26 ❧ Number 2 ❧ Summer 2026

A Publication of the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastica



FROM THE prioress

Reflecting on the “Catch-All Drawer” of Our Heart

Growing up in an old farmhouse, I remember very distinctly a drawer in the corner of our kitchen that Mom, Dad, and all my siblings called the “catch-all drawer.” At the time, I thought it was unique to our family, but later I discovered that nearly every home has one — the drawer that holds all the miscellaneous things we don’t know what to do with: birthday candles, Band-Aids, hairpins, buttons, knives, corks, safety pins, broken crayons — and the list goes on and on.

When we did our spring cleaning, my mom often asked me to clean out this drawer. I would begin by placing a newspaper on the kitchen table and dumping the contents of the drawer onto it. Then I would go through each item. Some things I cleaned, some I threw away, and others I returned to their proper places. The remaining items I organized and put back into the drawer so they would be handy and available for my brothers and sisters. I was always proud of how it looked when I finished. However, it didn’t stay that way for long.

I believe that each of us has a “catch-all drawer” in our heart. In this drawer, we collect hopes, memories, and joys. We also tuck away doubts about our abilities, apologies we never made, broken promises, unresolved conflicts, pains and misunderstandings with family and friends, and age-old grievances that we feel compelled to hold onto.

Our “heart drawer” requires occasional cleaning and reflection. There is quiet courage in opening it intentionally — in sitting with what we have stored away, letting it breathe, allowing memories to surface, and even permitting tears to fall. Sometimes we discover that fears we once thought overwhelming have softened over time. At other times, we are surprised to find that misunderstandings we believed we had forgotten still linger and fester. Resentments we never addressed stir strong emotions. The anger we felt when we were treated unfairly may still burn within us. These feelings take up space and call for our attention. To have a healthy heart, we are challenged to face and work through them.

*May you take time to
reflect on — and reverence
— the many gifts you
find in your own “heart
drawer.”*

As we explore our “heart drawer,” we also rediscover forgotten joys and delightful memories. We recall the pride we felt in achieving an award. We relive the fun we had on vacations. We notice how the look of approval from a teacher still brings us joy. We rediscover the deep love and acceptance we experienced when we had the courage to walk with a loved one



through cancer. We even laugh again at the memory of showing up a day early for a friend’s birthday party.

The most remarkable thing about the “catch-all drawer” of the heart is that it continues to expand — it grows and becomes ever larger. It fills us with energy, gives us a zest for life, and strengthens our ability to love as Jesus loved.

My most treasured “heart drawer” is where I find gratitude and blessings. This is where I “catch all” the wonderful things people have done for me and the powerful experiences on my journey as a Benedictine. Here, my heart often sheds a tear as I reflect on the deep love that has been given to me. It is also where I hold my profound affection for all our donors and friends who are so generous to our community.

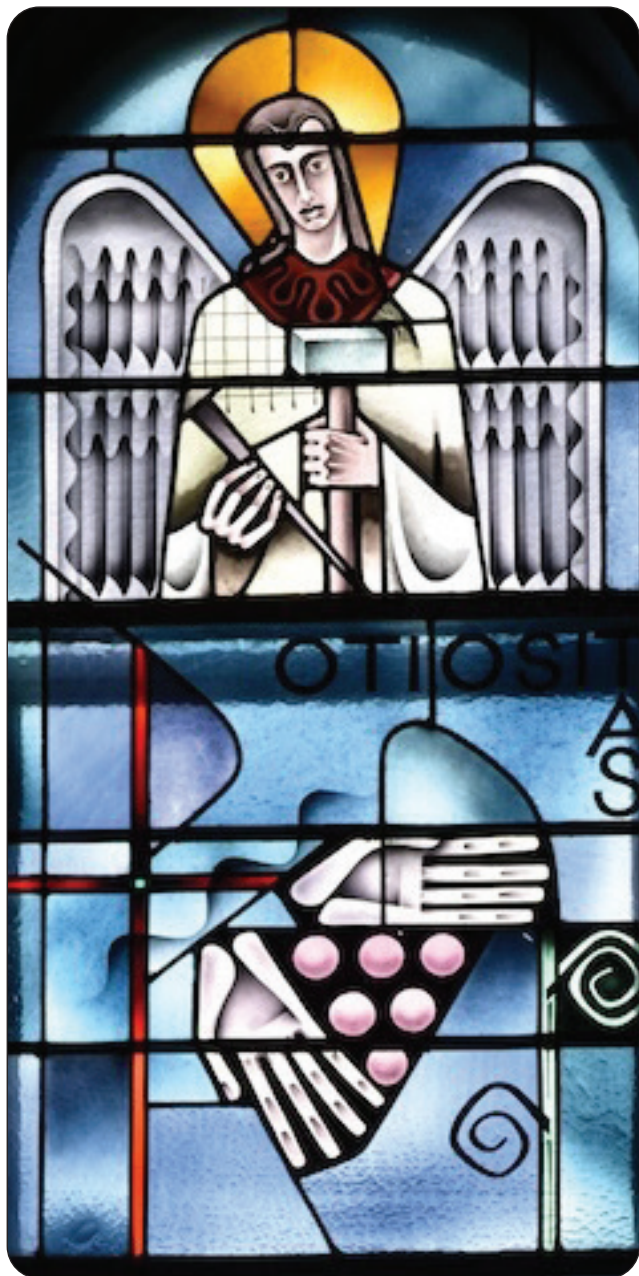
May you take time to reflect on — and reverence — the many gifts you find in your own “heart drawer.”

Sister Mary Elizabeth

Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, OSB

Welcome to our Donor Issue!

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



On the Cover

Sisters Suzanne Fitzmaurice and Gisélia Inacio Morais celebrated their 25th Jubilee with their monastic community, family, and friends on July 26, 2026.

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Sisters Gisélia and Suzanne Celebrate Their 25th Jubilee

On July 26, sisters of the Mount and family and friends of Sisters Suzanne Fitzmaurice and Gisélia Inacio Morais celebrated their 25th Jubilee with a Mass in St. Scholastica Chapel, followed by a luncheon. Here is a glimpse of how their lives as Benedictine sisters have unfolded.



Sister Suzanne Fitzmaurice

As a young adult, Sister Suzanne led a very active life. She spent a year in Seattle, Washington, with the Jesuit Volunteer Corp (JVC); graduated from Creighton University with a dual degree in education and ministry and earned a national

certification in youth ministry; worked with the JVC in Texas for three years; and was a parish youth minister in the Houston area for six years. Still, she said, “I always felt something was missing, but I wasn’t sure what that was.” Then, signs started pointing to religious life.

Quietly, she began exploring apostolic communities. An uncle who was a Benedictine monk suggested that she look at Benedictine monasteries. In 1997 she contacted Vocation Director Marcia Ziska via a website and came to the Mount for a visit. She said, “My world was very busy all the time; the stillness of Benedictine life attracted me, along with the chanting and prayer life.”

Sister Suzanne entered the Mount as a postulant in 1998, began her novitiate in 1999, made her first profession in 2001, and made her perpetual profession in 2004. She has engaged in a wide variety of ministries, with roles as a teacher and campus minister (at Notre Dame de Sion High School and Cristo Rey Kansas City High School); associate director of Keeler Women’s Center; and at the Mount, vocation minister, director of monastic temporalities, technology advisor, spiritual director, and retreat leader/presenter. She also has served on the Independent Review Boards for matters related to clergy sexual abuse and misconduct in both the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas, and the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph, Missouri.

Along the way, Sister Suzanne earned a Master’s in Theological Studies with a concentration in multiculturalism from the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley, California, and a Master’s in the Beginnings of Irish Christianity at University College, Cork, in Ireland, along with a certificate in spiritual direction from Sophia Spirituality Center. Her travels include a six-week trip to Tanzania in 2011 to teach sisters there and a two-week pilgrimage to visit Benedictine sites in Rome (see article on page 18) in spring 2026.

In reflecting on her life as a Benedictine, Sister Suzanne said that highlights include working at Cristo Rey, where she loved the students; her study in Ireland; the chance to offer talks and retreats; and the many opportunities she has had to meet other Benedictines throughout the United States and the world. “I’m grateful for so many things!” she said.

Sister Gisélia Inacio Moraes

The seeds of Sister Gisélia's vocation were planted during her childhood, at a time when her father had to travel to work in another city and her family faced many hardships. Sister Gisélia says, "There were some nuns who helped us a great deal, and to this day I am very grateful to them. My vocation was born from that living example set by those holy women; I was 7 years old at the time. They visited my mother often and helped us with food, clothing, and prayer."

Upon moving with her parents to Mineiros, Goiás, Brazil, she found a job at Divino Espirito Santo Parish, where Sister Eliene Batista Gouvea, OSB, was the coordinator and Father Joaquin Carlos Carvalho, OSB, was the pastor. Eventually she asked to do a trial period at the Benedictine convent and says, "At first, everything was new, but as I lived there alongside the sisters, I began to experience simple yet powerful moments of prayer, communal life, and work. This led me to make a firm decision: here was where I wanted to be, alongside those sisters whom I had always admired for their work, charism, and fidelity to the Church." Sister Gisélia made her first profession in 2001 and her perpetual profession in 2005.

Today Sister Gisélia serves in the liturgical music ministry at St. Benedict Parish in Mineiros, where she teaches, forms new liturgical music groups, and is the guitarist at some of the Sunday Masses. She notes, "Mineiros is a city with many Catholics — the church is always packed, and the people are welcoming, generous, and deeply devoted to prayer." Sister Gisélia also oversees a small farm owned by the sisters.

Sister Gisélia says, "From the very first moments I was introduced to the Rule of St. Benedict, I identified deeply with it, and my heart was already burning with the desire to seek to live according to St. Benedict's teachings. I have never had any doubts about the life



I chose to live. Yes, there have been good times and bad times, but my trust and hope in God have always calmed me, and the storms have subsided. Little by little, I have learned that living in community is an art — knowing how to live together with great wisdom and love for my sisters and for God."

Sister Gisélia offers her deep gratitude to Bishop Quirino, OSB, her spiritual director throughout his time in Brazil; Bishop Rui, OSB, with whom she studied the Bible; Bishop Joaquim Carlos, OSB, and Sister Ursula Worringen, OSB, her instructors in the Rule of St. Benedict; Angelita Sousa, a friend who has provided constant support; Sister Eliene, "because it is through her efforts that I am who I am as a person and as a religious sister;" and Mount Saint Scholastica, "for the tremendous support throughout every stage of my formation and for accepting me as a member of this great community."

About Our Sisters in Brazil

Sister Gisélia lives with two other Brazilian sisters at Mosteiro Santa Maria Mãe de Deus (Holy Mother of God Monastery) in the heart of the city of Mineiros. Sister Eilene Baptista Gouvea is a secondary Portuguese language teacher, a catechist, and a pastoral minister. Sister Joselaine Ferreira is employed as a university advisor and is pursuing a master's degree in education. The community works alongside a brother monastery, St. Joseph Priory, which is part of St. Benedict's Abbey.

Initial Formation News

Novice Kathleen Ann Lee

Kathleen Ann Lee will complete her canonical novitiate year on August 24, 2026. During this year of focused study, prayer, and exploration of community life, she took classes on the Rule of St. Benedict with Sister Cecilia Olson, Monastic History with Sister Judith Sutera, Catholic Social Teaching with Sister Anne Shepard, and the Gospel of Mark with Sisters Jennifer Halling and Patricia Seipel. Kathleen Ann assisted Sister Cecilia with sacristan duties and helped with a variety of tasks in the monastery. She also is a member of the schola, our liturgical choir.

Upon completing her canonical novice year, Kathleen Ann will enjoy some time with her family and then plans to continue her education at Benedictine College. She said, "My canonical year has brought about an opportunity for me to prayerfully learn about Benedictine monasticism. It has also allowed me an enhanced understanding of who I am at my core. I am eternally grateful and humbled for this time of formation."



Postulant Vicky Ortega (left) and Novice Kathleen Ann Lee (right)

Postulant Vicky Ortega

Victoria (Vicky) Ortega joined the Mount as a postulant on February 10, 2026. A native of Denver, Colorado, Vicky first encountered our community when she was seeking a spiritual director through the Sophia Spirituality Center website. She began visiting with Vocation Director Marcia Ziska and became an affiliate in 2025. Her attraction to the Benedictine charism, especially the chanting of the Divine Office, grew during her visits to the Mount.

Vicky has a bachelor's degree in political science, a Juris Doctor (law) degree, and a graduate certificate in elections. She practiced law as assistant city attorney for the city and county of Denver for 31 years.

In her first six months as a postulant, Vicky has studied the history of the Mount, *Lectio Divina*, and the Gospel of Mark. She has assisted our liturgist, Sr. Susan Barber, with office tasks, and helps in Dooley Center several afternoons a week. Vicky says, "God has given me a great blessing to be here. My vocation has been in my heart for a long time." We appreciate Vicky's faithfulness to prayer and her generous service to the community!

Walk With Us

Learn about our formation program at our website:

mountosb.org/walk-with-us/become-a-sister/

or contact

Vocation Director Marcia Ziska:
mziska@mountosb.org

Work Progresses on New Elevator

In April 2026, Kearney Construction Company began laying the groundwork for a new four-story elevator located on the northwest side of the monastery. Our current elevator, which was built in the late 1930s and updated in the 1980s, is still functional but has frequent breakdowns and won't accommodate a stretcher, so we are looking forward to the new addition.

As the new, larger elevator is built, renovations also will be made to add bathrooms and laundry facilities on the north end of the monastery, as well as a gathering space across the hall from the Choir Chapel on the first floor. It is anticipated that most of the work will be completed by the end of the year.

We are grateful to our donors who have supported this project and invite everyone to join us in praying for the safety of the construction crew as their work continues.

*Your love,
Lord,
reaches to
the heavens,
your
faithfulness
to the skies
(Ps 36:6)*



Dear Friends,

It's midday as I write and the monastery's bell is ringing, announcing the reception of the body of Sister Mary Grosdidier. The sisters gather to solemnly receive her body and in procession carry her to the chapel for a short, purposeful liturgical service. This includes singing the Suscipe prayer, a monumental one for the sisters of the Mount. It's sung at significant times in a sister's life, beginning with her profession to God and community and for the last time after she has faithfully completed a life of commitment:

"Receive me, O Lord, as you have promised that I may live; disappoint me not in my hope"

I heard many stories about Sister Mary's life, including her bout with polio at a young age. However, she was determined that she would not let disability or an aging body prevent her from leading a life of service. For example, she lived out the Mount's value of caring for creation by persistently collecting leftover water from drinking glasses to water the many plants in the monastery. I also heard about her teaching and administrative career spanning five states.

Sister Mary Grosdidier lived to be 92, with 69 of those years spent living out her Benedictine vows. She was faithful until the very end. Her life epitomizes legacy—not in a self-promoting sense but in a self-emptying one, giving to the very end.

It is this type of legacy that undergirds the Mount's Legacy Society. Membership is offered to anyone who commits to give some of their treasure after their death to the sisters. In my short tenure here, I have already seen the massive impact these legacy gifts have on the Mount's finances. These legacy gifts help sustain the sisters' financial health and allow them to continue giving themselves away in service. It's been a solemn experience for me to receive these gifts, made from people coming from all walks of life. In response, the sisters offer their gratitude by remembering the deceased in their prayers.

Would you consider joining the Mount's Legacy Society by offering a legacy gift, which will help ensure that the Mount thrives well into the future? For more information, visit www.mountosb.org, and click on the "Donate" tab to find information on the Society and the types of assets that can be donated. Or you can contact me directly either by phone at 913-426-5185 or via email at cjehle@mountosb.org.

With gratitude,

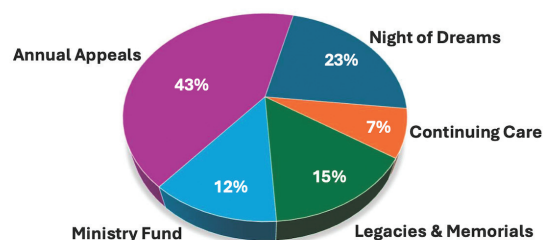


Chris Jehle
Director of Development



Donation Sources 2025

Total \$2,831,673



Uses of Donations 2025



Join us for our 30th Annual
Night of Dreams

October 25, 2026
Overland Park Convention Center

Register or buy raffle tickets at
mountosb.org/donate/night-of-dreams/



Thank you to our generous donors

On the following pages are names of persons who made a donation to Mount St. Scholastica during the 2025 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!

Mount Welcomes Seven New Oblates

On May 2, 2026, the Mount was blessed with seven new oblates in the annual Rite of Oblation. As always, the stories of the oblates' journeys show the range of ways by which God calls.

Sophia Spirituality Center has become a pathway for many oblates, and this year's group was no exception. Margaret Harris, a resident of Lawrence, Kansas, began attending online offerings and her "heart felt like it found a home to grow and thrive." She later completed the Souljourners spiritual director training program.

Another Souljourners graduate is Lisa Martin from Topeka, Kansas. She has had a career in public health food and nutrition and found out about the program from another Souljourner. At the Mount, she found "a community of like-minded people that I would like to be a part of in serving God and serving others."

One of Lisa's services has been on a cooking team that helped feed the Sophia attendees; a fellow graduate and cook is Harriet White. Harriet regularly comes to the Mount from her home in Lamoni, Iowa, for personal retreats. As an oblate, she wants "to share with others what I received in companionship, inspiration, wisdom and the guidance of Benedict's Rule."

Coincidentally, another new oblate, Kathy Muehl of Parkville, Missouri, has a different volunteer cooking connection. While volunteering at Bishop Sullivan Center in Kansas City, she met another volunteer, Oblate Maxine Skaggs, and saw "faith and love in the sisters and oblates ... to pick up my journey over and over again."

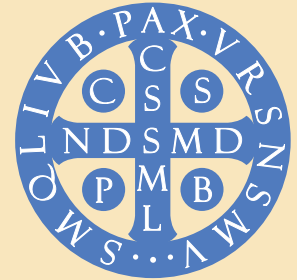
Volunteering also played a large role in bringing Mary Wheeler to oblation. She is a volunteer at Keeler Women's Center and participates in an oblate group that meets there. Her experience moved her to want to "continue to learn and practice the Benedictine philosophy and to be a help and friend where I can."

Kara Reed of rural Leavenworth, Kansas, is a biology professor at Kansas City Kansas



Our new oblates, L-R, back row: Lisa Martin, Margaret Harris, and Alyson Weiser. L-R, front row: Mary Wheeler, Kara Reed, Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger (prioress), Harriet White, and Kathy Muehl.

Community College who has been attending retreats at Sophia Center for many years. She describes her faith search as long and winding but "to find a tradition rooted so deeply in peace and love was truly an answer to my lifelong prayer."



Kara travels to oblate meetings of the Topeka deanery with Alyson Weiser of Tonganoxie, Kansas, a friend she met through Sophia Center. Alyson is more than busy with teenaged sons, work as a psychiatric nurse for youth, and part-time study at St. Paul Methodist School of Theology. But she knows that "the Benedictine way provides a strong and stable foundation on which everything else — family, work, school, relationships, church life — can rest."

These new oblates join more than 200 other men and women who have joined their lives to those of the sisters. In addition to the groups that meet in Kansas City, St. Joseph, Topeka, and Atchison, there is now a group entirely online for oblates who live outside the area. Through the oblates, the Mount's prayer and community continue to grow and thrive.

A Bridge Over Troubled Waters: The 2026 Oblate Institute

By Oblate Judith Valente

"To be at peace in my own heart"
"To keep cultivating a spirit of hospitality"
"To be a bridge over troubled waters for others"

These were some of the intentions that oblates from across the country said they are taking away from the 2026 Oblate Institute, held at the Mount July 9-12, 2026.

This year's Institute drew 35 participants in person to Sophia Spirituality Center and another 27 who joined via Zoom. They represented monasteries stretching from Massachusetts to South Dakota, Illinois to New Mexico. Coming from a variety of faith traditions, they reflected the continuing ecumenical reach and appeal of the Rule of St. Benedict.

The Institute's overall theme of "Yearning for Life: Living *The Rule of St. Benedict* in Troubled Times" sparked lively discussion as our country faces a myriad of crises. Each of the four sessions touched on some aspect of the Rule relevant to these challenging times.

- "A Bridge Over Troubled Waters" examined the Rule as a text of hope that has allowed Benedictines to serve as a bridge between many eras in history and to respond to the next great need.
- "To Be A Saint" drew on the many chapters in the Rule relating to prayer, while weaving in the wisdom of other writers as well as the prayer practices of Catholic Worker co-founder Dorothy Day and the great Catholic peace activist Eileen Egan, sister of the Mount's own Sister Kathleen Egan. Day was also a Benedictine oblate.
- "Let Peace Be Your Aim" delved into the chapters in *The Rule* that relate to relationship repair and explored how each of us can become "islands of peace."
- "The Care of Souls" explored how each oblate today is called to be a leader, rather than a follower, a giver rather than consumer of Benedictine spirituality. We examined what it means to be a "servant leader" and



challenged ourselves to see how each of us can be "the Benedict that today's world needs."

At the closing, all vowed to become "walking billboards" for the Benedictine values of listening, hospitality, humility, community, prayer and work and to share more frequently with their family members and friends about their Benedictine life. May the energy generated at this year's Institute continue to carry us into the future.



Oblates presented Sister Thomasita Homan with a book of her poems, *Scribbling in the Air*, to thank her for her years of service as an oblate director at the Mount. L-R: Oblate Director Faye Miller, Sister Thomasita, and Oblate Judith Valente.

Sister Rocio Learns English While Volunteering at the Mount

By Barbara Ann Mayer, OSB

Sister Rocio Garcia Villegas from Tulancingo, Hidalgo, Mexico, resided at the Mount from February through April 2026. She assisted the community in various ways as a volunteer while working to improve her English skills.

Sister Rocio connected with Sister Helga Leija at a 2025 gathering for religious communicators in Rome. Sister Helga invited Sister Rocio to spend some time at the Mount, where she would be immersed in an English-speaking environment.

In reflecting on her time at the Mount, Sister Rocio said, "I enjoyed your Benedictine hospitality and love of learning. Also, your care of the earth is evident. I love your motto: 'Listen with the ear of your heart.'" She continued, "Sister Delores Dolezal tutored me in reading English, and an oblate, John Hosler, worked with me on my conversation skills. All the sisters helped me speak English at meals, and I enjoyed chanting the psalms with you at prayers."

Sister Rocio has a bachelor's degree in digital marketing and community management and a master's degree in education innovation. Her new ministry will be to set up a communications office for her community, Hijas de Maria Immaculada de



Oblate John Hosler and Sister Rocio Garcia Villegas

Guadalupe, as well as for other communities, in Mexico City. Before doing that, she is attending a three-month training program with Vatican News in Rome called the Pentecost Project. The purpose of this program is to teach women religious to communicate the stories of consecrated women around the world.

"It has been a blessing to be at the Mount," Sister Rocio said with a big smile. "Your community is helping my community and the Church in Mexico. I am very grateful."

Celebrating a New Souljourners Graduating Class



2026 Souljourners graduates, L-R: Tammy Herzig, Carol Blakely Gaumer, Jane Siebert, Jennifer Stallbaumer Rouyer, Kara Wilson Tucker, Clarice Korger, OSB, Scott Laurent, Cate Zimmermann, Mike Daugherty, and Channin Daugherty

On July 18, ten Souljourners students culminated three years of study, skill building, practicum work, and fellowship at a graduation ceremony in St. Scholastica Chapel, where they received a certificate in spiritual direction. The ceremony was followed by a reception with family, friends, and past Souljourners graduates at Sophia Spirituality Center. The class presented the staff with a framed portrait of a sunrise taken by class member Scott Laurent on the Mount campus.

Graduate Mike Daugherty commented, “We’re in a culture where silence is uncomfortable and when you talk to someone, you’re always thinking about what you’ll say next. I always thought I was a good listener, but as one of our presenters said, ‘You don’t know what you don’t know until you know something else.’ This program has taught me how to be fully present to others and really listen.”

Another graduate, Carol Blakely Gaumer, said, “Souljourners has been transformative for me. I have grown in how I experience God in my daily life and feel so privileged to have completed this training so I can be a better companion to others on life’s journey.”

A new group of Souljourners will begin taking classes in mid-September. For more information about the program, check out the Mount website at mountosb.org/sophia-spirituality-center/souljourners/ or contact Sister Marcia Ziska at 913/360-6173.

Sister Anne Elizabeth Sweet Receives Offeramus Medal

At the Benedictine College Alumni Banquet on June 13, 2026, the Offeramus Medal was presented to Sister Anne Elizabeth Sweet, OCSO, a 1973 graduate of Benedictine College (BC). This award was established by Mount Saint Scholastica College in 1957 to recognize female alumnae who have distinguished themselves in their profession and in service to their community and have reflected honor on the college through their lives.

Sister Anne Elizabeth began her monastic journey when she entered Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama, in 1969. She felt God's call to transfer her profession to the Mount community in 1972. While working in the Kansas City area, she pursued advanced language studies in Hebrew and Greek before earning a master's degree in theology with a concentration in Scripture from Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. She later served as liturgist for the Mount, worked in campus ministry, and taught Scripture courses at BC. She earned her doctorate from the University of Notre Dame in 1992.

During this time, Sister Anne Elizabeth experienced a profound "call within a call," leading her toward a more contemplative life of prayer and solitude. In 1996, she transferred to Our Lady of the Mississippi Cistercian Abbey in Dubuque, Iowa. Her community started a monastic foundation in Norway, and Sister Anne Elizabeth was sent there to provide formation classes. She discerned that she should stay, and she has been a resident since 2006, serving as a sign of God's existence and presence to the largely secular Norwegian population.



Sister Anne Elizabeth Sweet (2026 Offeramus Award recipient, center) with some of her former students. L-R: BC President Steve Minnis, Father Meinrad Miller, Joni Brophy Colwell, Sister Susan Barber, Sister Patricia Seipel, Abbot James Albers, and Joanne Huey.

Sister Anne Elizabeth noted, "One goal of my life has been to share the word of God and give others the tools to become more acquainted with it. ... In 40 years of writing and teaching, I have tried to help people enter more deeply into Scripture as a word that God speaks to them personally. This is where my Benedictine education has been of tremendous importance to me. I am grateful to the Lord for giving me all the opportunities and experiences that I have had in my life, and I am grateful to the sisters at the Mount and to BC for teaching me how to use the talents and gifts God has given me in the service of God's people."

Thank you to our generous donors

Sisters Host Employee Picnic

The annual Employee Service Awards Picnic for employees of the monastery and Dooley Center was held on May 28, 2026. Those receiving service awards were Bill Caylor and Lois Chapin (20 years); Alison Simpson (15 years); Brenda Mortell (10 years); and Michel Fobbs, Stacey Handke, and Carolina Mora (5 years). Brats were grilled by Sisters Elaine Fischer and Barbara Smith; baked beans, chips, and ice cream also were served. The sisters always enjoy meeting family members of our employees at this event, and we are happy for the chance to express our gratitude for our employees' hard work and care for us and our guests.



L-R: Anthony Ross, Darlene Blasing, Pam Larkin, and a guest enjoy the employee picnic.



Sister Mary Elizabeth Schweiger presents Bill Caylor with a certificate for his 20 years of service in the maintenance department.



L-R: Emma, Stacey, Craig, Case, and Lola Handke celebrate Stacey's five years of service at Dooley Center.

*“Let them
regard all
the vessels
and goods
of the
monastery
as if they
were the
sacred
vessels of
the altar”*

RB 31:10



Sisters Embark on a Benedictine Pilgrimage

By Helga Leija, OSB



Four sisters from the Mount attended a Benedictine pilgrimage in Italy: Sister Marcia Ziska (co-leader), back row, second from left; and Sisters Suzanne Fitzmaurice, Molly Brockwell, and Helga Leija (front row, third, fourth, and fifth from the right).

From May 27 to June 11, 2026, Benedictine sisters from congregations across the United States traveled together on a pilgrimage led by Sister Marcia Ziska, OSB, and Father Edward Linton, OSB. The pilgrimage followed the footsteps of Saints Benedict and Scholastica through Rome, Norcia, Subiaco, Monte Cassino, and other places important to Benedictine history. The pilgrimage was made possible through funding from

the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and our Benedictine communities.

Our first stop was Norcia, the birthplace of Saints Benedict and Scholastica. There we met Benedictine monks and nuns whose monasteries were destroyed in a 2016 earthquake. The sisters are still living in container homes while they rebuild. I was struck by their joy and commitment to

continue living their vocation despite their challenges.

We celebrated Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, visited the Vatican Museums and Sistine Chapel, prayed before the tomb of Pope Francis at St. Mary Major, and climbed the Holy Stairs. At Monte Cassino, I was inspired by the history of a monastery that has been destroyed and rebuilt four times. Each time, the monks began again.



Some of the most memorable moments were the ones we did not plan. In Norcia, a short conversation in my very imperfect Italian with a shopkeeper led to her sharing how her family hid soldiers during World War II. At the Monastery of the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome, the sisters welcomed us into their cloister for coffee and conversation.

After we visited a Benedictine community in Cassino, our bus broke down. Instead of being an inconvenience, the delay was a gift. We spent extra time together, shared

a meal, prayed Evening Prayer, and learned more about each other.

Toward the end of our pilgrimage, we visited Assisi and the tombs of Saints Francis, Clare, and Carlo Acutis, the newest saint from Umbria. I came to Italy hoping to walk in the footsteps of Saints Benedict and Scholastica and returned home with memories of the people who welcomed us, shared their stories, and showed us what it means to live the Benedictine way today. I am grateful for all Benedictines who continue to follow those footsteps.



L-R: Sisters Suzanne Fitzmaurice, Helga Leija, Marcia Ziska, and Molly Brockwell outside the town of Norcia, Italy, the birthplace of Saints Benedict and Scholastica.

One of the highlights of the pilgrimage was attending the audience with Pope Leo in St. Peter's Square. Sister Molly Brockwell brought a sign identifying herself as an alumna of Catholic Theological Union, hoping to receive a thumbs-up from the pope. We arrived early and waited through heavy rain, thunder and lightning. When Pope Leo passed by in the popemobile, the wait was worth it as Sister Molly received the thumbs-up she was hoping for.



At an audience with Pope Leo, who is an alumnus of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Sister Molly Brockwell, also an alum, held up a sign, hoping to catch his attention....



Pope Leo caught sight of Sister Molly's sign and was delighted to see a fellow alum!

Lifelong Learning Experiences

One characteristic of Benedictines is their love of learning, and Mount sisters have had many opportunities for spiritual and educational enrichment in 2026.

- At a Sabbath Sunday presentation on March 1, Sisters Mary Margaret Kean, Rita Killackey, Gabrielle Kocour, and Janelle Maes offered their perspectives on aging. They commented on experiences that had formed them during childhood and in monastic life, answered questions, and concluded with advice for younger sisters and those in formation.
- On February 22, Fr. Meinrad Miller gave a presentation about the role of the Eucharist in our lives as Benedictines.
- At a Topic Tuesday presentation on April 21, Benedictine College professor Dr. Mariele Courtois gave a presentation about Catholic Social Teaching and artificial intelligence.
- On May 3, Lisa Wagner-Carollo performed the one-woman play *To Pray Marvelously Well: The Spiritual Friendship of St. Edith Stein and St. Teresa of Avila* in St. Lucy Chapel. The play was set on the eve of the day when Edith Stein (Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) was apprehended by Nazis and taken to a concentration camp.



- Scripture scholar and author Bonnie Thurston was the director of our annual community retreat the week of June 7-13. She helped us reflect on the women in the Gospel of John, focusing on Mary, the mother of Jesus; the Samaritan woman theologian; the woman accused of adultery; Martha and Mary of Bethany; and Mary of Magdala.

2026 retreat director Bonnie Thurston

Thank you to our generous donors

Dooley Center Welcomes New Residents from Benet Hill Monastery

By Barbara Ann Mayer, OSB



L-R: Sisters Marilyn Carpenter, Anne Stedman, and Deb Kuhl

On April 14, 2026, the Mount welcomed three Benedictine sisters from Benet Hill Monastery in Colorado Springs, Colorado, who are now residing in Dooley Center.

Sister Marilyn Carpenter taught for many years in Benet Hill's online spiritual direction training program. She now spends much of her free time reading novels, saying, "During my active ministry I read so many spiritual books that I now just want to read fiction." Sister Marilyn also enjoys visiting with sisters, staff, and guests.

Sister Anne Stedman, a former prioress at Benet Hill Monastery, was surprised to see so many sisters she knew upon arriving at the Mount. "Seeing them helped me feel at home," she said. Sister Anne enjoys playing the organ, singing Gregorian chants, and watching sports, especially tennis. "The staff here has been super," she noted.

Sister Deb Kuhl was a teacher in Colorado for almost 50 years. She was surprised at the number of sisters at the Mount and is happy living in Dooley Center. She likes to watch all kinds of sports, so she fits right in with the other residents!

Thanks to technology, Sisters Marilyn, Deb, and Anne are able to participate in Benet Hill community meetings and other special events, such as a Founder's Day prayer service. They are grateful that they can stay in touch with their community on a regular basis while receiving the care they need at Dooley Center. We love having them with us!

2026 Fellin Lecture

On April 26, 2026, the Mount hosted the Annual Mary L. Fellin Lecture at the O'Malley-McAllister Auditorium at Benedictine College. The speaker was Kim Daniels, J.D., who spoke on the topic of "Pope Leo, Synodality, and Women's Leadership in a Global Church."

Daniels is the Director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University. She served from 2016-2026 as a member of the Vatican Dicastery for Communication and in the 2021-24 Synod on Synodality as an expert participant and coordinator of one of the ten major Synod study groups, which focused on the Church's mission in the digital environment. As such, she is uniquely positioned to offer perspectives on synodality and women's leadership in a global church.

Daniels also gave an informal presentation to the Mount sisters on the topic of "Pope Leo's First Year," which the sisters found informative and thought provoking.

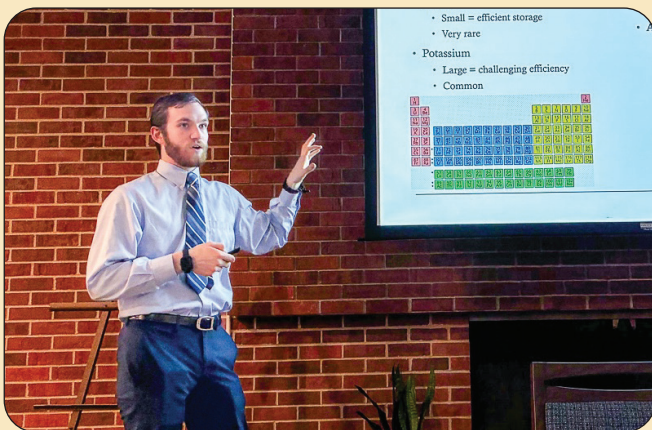


Thank you to our generous donors

BC Students Receive Wangari Committee Discovery Day Grants

Two students from Benedictine College, Matt Wilson (left) and Leo Hull (right), received grants from the Mount Wangari Committee for their 2026 Discovery Day projects. The Wangari Committee supports projects with applications in the areas of stewardship, sustainability, women's equality, and environmental justice.

The students presented their experiments to the sisters at the monastery on May 23, 2026. Matt attempted to create a potassium ion battery with the use of corn husks; although the experiment didn't succeed, he learned a lot in the process. Leo explored the use of cinnamon to control hookworms. His experiment was successful, but the project needs to be modified to have practical applications. We wish Matt and Leo much success in their future endeavors!



Thank you to our generous donors

Mount Manuscripts Garner Attention

Last year, the Mount was invited to be a partner in the Peripheral Manuscripts Project (<https://peripheralms.org>), which is searching for medieval manuscripts that are not in the collections of major libraries and museums. Scholars from the University of Indiana travel throughout the Midwest identifying and cataloguing the books and single leaves that are in small institutional or monastic archives or hanging on walls. After World War II, many priceless handmade books from before the sixteenth century were torn apart so that single pages could be sold individually for greater profit. Now, researchers are digitally re-assembling these books.

Dr. Liz Hebbard, one of the researchers, came to Atchison and painstakingly examined more than a dozen leaves, measuring the size of the page, the number and spacing of lines, and other details to try to match them with pages from other places. Dr. Hebbard felt she had found a hidden treasure: “So many things about this partnership with sisters make it unique even within our project that focuses on small unknown collections.”

She was assisted by Benedictine College student Alexandra Joyce, who was invited by Sister Judith Sutera to do this as her Discovery Day project. Alexandra is majoring in art history and chemistry and hopes to work in museum preservation. Having come from a small town in Wyoming, she was delighted: “I never imagined that I would have the opportunity to get this kind of hands-on experience and meet real experts if I had not come to Benedictine College.”

Dr. Hebbard was also impressed with Alexandra: “The partnership with the college and watching Sister Judith mentor Alexandra for her project has been incredible. We’re excited about passing on our love of these things to a new generation, teaching them how special these artworks are and the unique skills that people who work with manuscripts use.”

The items are now on their way to the University of Iowa, the project’s partner for high-quality

digitization, so that the images can be shared with the world while the originals return to be cherished by their Atchison caretakers.



L-R: Benedictine College student Alexandra Joyce, Dr. Steven Gromatzky, BC librarian, and Dr. Liz Hebbard



Thank you to our generous donors

A Big Hoop-De-Do for the Garden



Sisters, employees, and volunteers finish constructing the hoop house.

From a distance, our new “hoop house” (greenhouse) almost looks like a covered wagon from days of old — but instead of rolling across the prairie, it’s anchored firmly in place and filled with tomato, eggplant, and pepper plants.

Thanks to a generous donor who gave us the 25 × 75 frame, this impressive structure will enable us to plant earlier in the spring and harvest later in the fall, with half the produce being used by the Mount and half going to the Atchison Catholic Charities food pantry.

Constructing the hoop house was quite a project. Fortunately, our employee Dirk Weatherford is experienced in greenhouse construction. Once the frame was assembled (with the help of some Benedictine College engineering students), installing the plastic covering was an all-hands-on-deck process, requiring a “fluffer,” “sweepers,” “pullers,” “wiggle wire inputters,” “pole drivers,” a Bobcat driver, and persons to hold ladders. Those assisting in this endeavor were volunteers Paul and Ed Weatherford and Jeff Schuele (a member of the Merrywood Community Garden committee); employees Bill Caylor and Dirk Weatherford; and Sisters Rosann Eckart, Elaine Fischer, Helen Muetting, and Barbara Smith.

Sister Elaine Fischer created a drip watering system for the greenhouse using PVC pipe and a pump that draws water from one of the Mount’s nearby cisterns. The plants are flourishing, and with a fall planting of lettuce and spinach, we look forward to eating fresh produce well into November. As always, we marvel at the abundance God generates for us!

Thank you to our generous donors



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THE DESERT MOTHERS

Judith Sutera, OSB NOV. 20-21

CONTEMPLATIVE SILENT ADVENT RETREAT

Kristina Frank & Elizabeth Carrillo, OSB NOV. 30-DEC. 4

JOURNEY THROUGH ADVENT: A LABYRINTH DAY

Mark Lepper DEC. 5

ZENTANGLE FOR BEGINNERS

Patricia Seipel, OSB DEC. 11-12

DIVINE HARMONIES

Suzanne Fitzmaurice, OSB JAN. 8-9, 2027

MEETING THE DIVINE WITH CENTERING/WELCOMING PRAYER

Dennie Oades & Kevin Kelley JAN. 28-30

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2025 - 2026 FISCAL YEAR REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

72

ENGLISH ONLY
PROGRAMS

24

COMPLETELY IN
SPANISH
PROGRAMS

78

TOTAL
VOLUNTEERS

761

COUNSELING
SESSIONS
Total in English and Spanish

\$28,778.69

TOTAL GIVEN IN
DIRECT ASSISTANCE

10,225

TOTAL
SERVICES
PROVIDED

15

BILINGUAL
OFFERINGS

63

EASY ENGLISH
STUDENTS

10

PARTNER AGENCY
VOLUNTEERS

57

COMMUNITY
VOLUNTEERS

11

VOLUNTEER
TUTORS

44

ENGLISH
SUPPORT GROUP
PARTICIPANTS

56

SPANISH
SUPPORT GROUP
PARTICIPANTS

295

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En español



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Counseling line
(bilingual)



(913) 669 - 6719
Direct Assistance

www.keelerwomenscenter.org

News from Keeler Women's Center

Volunteer Appreciation Event

Keeler Women's Center (KWC) celebrated the contributions of more than 50 volunteers on April 23, 2026, at the Shawnee Town 1929 Museum in Shawnee, Kansas. Two retiring volunteers received special recognition: Yolanda McGill, who had served as a receptionist on Thursday mornings since 2022, and Sister Mary Agnes Patterson, OSB, who in her role as Development Director of Mount St. Scholastica had worked to secure funds for KWC since 2005.

In 2025, 80 volunteers worked with KWC staff members to provide services to more than 10,623 people. As Director Bridget Dickason, OSB, commented, "We are very grateful to have so much love and support from all of our volunteers. We couldn't have served so many people without them!"

Visit by Archbishop Shawn McKnight

On May 2, Archbishop Shawn McKnight visited Keeler Women's Center. He toured the facility, learned about the programs and services that KWC provides, and enjoyed lunch with the staff. On his Facebook pages, he commented, "I toured Keeler Women's Center on Wednesday afternoon and was edified by the numerous programs and support systems offered. Over the past 23 years they have offered counseling, support groups and classes to thousands of people by coordinating with over 150 professional volunteers and area agency partners to offer everything free of charge. Thank you, KWC, for being the hands and feet of Jesus for women in the Kansas City urban core!"



Staff, volunteers, and board members at the Keeler Women's Center appreciation event



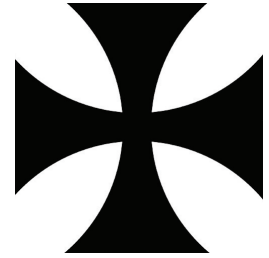
Sister Maria Nguyen greets Archbishop Shawn McKnight

Thank you to our generous donors



L-R: Sisters Jennifer Halling, Marcia Ziska, Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, Elaine Fischer, and Mary Rardin attended a chapter meeting of the St. Scholastica Monastic Congregation at the Bon Secours Retreat and Conference Center near Baltimore, Maryland, from June 25 to July 1, 2026.

The theme of the meeting was “Courage to See, Freedom to Risk” and included presentations about the call to transformation by Sr. Rosann Ocken, OSB; “Metaphors to Help Us Meet This Moment” by poet Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer; the current situation of Benedictine sisters in Ukraine by Mother Abbess Klara Sviderska, OSB (via Zoom); and plans to celebrate a worldwide Benedictine Jubilee in 2029 by Abbot Primate Jeremias Schröder (via Zoom). Sister Elaine Fischer was re-elected as First Councilor of the Monastic Congregation Council.



Sisters Share Mission with Employees

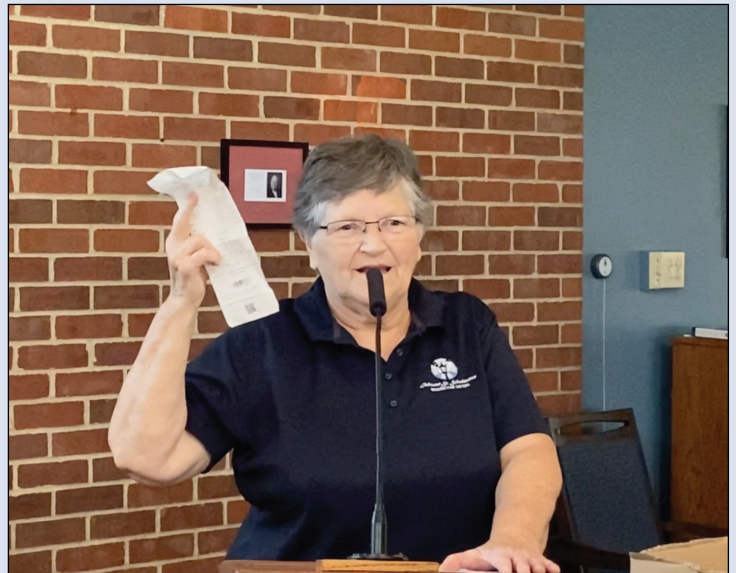
Sisters held Mission Effectiveness meetings on April 9 and July 9 for employees of the Mount and Dooley Center to give them a sense of our history and the values we live by. Meetings were held both in the morning and the evening to accommodate the employees' work schedules.

The program on April 9 consisted of a tour of the first floor of St. Cecilia's (led by Sisters Patricia Gamgort and Rosann Eckart); St. Scholastica Chapel (led by Sister Judith Sutera); the Choir Chapel (led by Sister Suzanne Fitzmaurice); and the library/living room area on the first floor of the monastery (led by Sister Delores Dolezal). Sister Judith conducted the entire tour for the evening group, which was smaller.

Sister Linda Zahner introduced the meeting on July 9 by explaining to the employees that one of our community goals is care of the earth.

The Wangari committee then gave a presentation about the Mount's ecological efforts. Sister Helen Mueting led a prayer and gave an overview; Sister Elizabeth Carrillo prepared a PowerPoint presentation about our Benedictine values relating to care of the earth; Sister Elaine Fischer described our use of cisterns and solar panels and our composting, gardening, and beekeeping practices; and Sister Alberta Hermann led an exercise relating to what can and cannot be recycled, with the assistance of Sister Barbara Smith.

The Mission Effectiveness Committee members who facilitate these quarterly meetings are Sisters Linda Zahner (chair), Barbara Conroy, Patricia Gamgort, and Constance Krstolic.



Sister Alberta Hermann guides employees in a discussion about recycling.



Institutional & Corporate Donors

We are grateful to the businesses and institutions that made a donation of money, goods or services in 2025.



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 2025.



*The Mount has published a second book of poetry by Sister Grace Malaney, *Sing on the Soft Side of Light*. The book is available at the Mount's gift shop or via the Mount website at <https://www.mountosb.org/gift-shop/>; the cost is \$10.*



Donations in Memoriam

We are grateful to those who made a donation to the Mount in 2025 in memory of the following deceased loved ones whom we have remembered in our prayers.

Thank you to our generous donors



We remember with gratitude and love

Full obituaries of the sisters are on our website: mountosb.org/obituaries/

Sister Sylvia Kenkel, OSB

May 24, 1939 – February 28, 2026

Sister Sylvia and her twin brother Sylvan were born into a large family in the rural Panama, Iowa, area. Because Panama had been a mission of the Atchison Benedictines for decades, Sister Sylvia would have known not only the sisters who taught there but the numerous sisters who were relatives of Panama families. She joined their ranks at the Mount in 1957 and became a teacher. After a few years of teaching, she found her true calling in health care and became a licensed practical nurse. Thereafter, she would serve the elder or ailing sisters with tender care for the rest of her life, even in later years when she was a resident of Dooley Center herself. Her other great talent was in art. Teaching crafts to the Dooley Center sisters, fixing their hair, and making greeting cards were all woven together in her life of service. Extending these gifts beyond the monastery, she loved the summers she spent at a camp for people with cerebral palsy. Hers was a quiet and unassuming, but cheerful and prayerful, life that would comfort both body and soul of those who were in her care.



Sister Kathleen Flanagan, OSB

January 11, 1956 – April 6, 2026

Sister Kathleen Flanagan left this life unexpectedly, joining Jesus' resurrection on the morning after Easter Sunday. Growing up in Colorado, she relished her summers as a camp counselor in the mountains before coming to Atchison as a Benedictine College student. She returned to enter the community in 1984. Much of her career was in the urban core of Kansas City, where her master's degrees in both library science and counseling were valued assets. She was a dynamic teacher and librarian whose love of books was imparted enthusiastically to every student and teacher whose life she touched. She especially loved those she called her "kinders," introducing the youngest readers to the magic of books. At the time of her death, she was the co-director of the library at Benedictine College and was looking forward to the dedication of the vastly expanded new library that was being built. Her life of prayer, and love for her family and the sisters, sustained her and provided her the joy she shared so generously with others.



Sister Mary (Rochelle) Grosdidier, OSB

December 4, 1933 – July 5, 2026

The popular French name “Didier” is derived from Latin for “desire” and “gros” is large, an appropriate name for someone who so greatly desired and loved her God. After a bout with polio at age six, Sister Mary recovered sufficiently to graduate from Webster College and enter the monastic community in 1957. She went on to get a master’s degree in history and had a long career as a teacher and principal in Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Iowa, and Colorado. Assisted by a cane and motivated by her great love of travel and of her family, she visited states from Maine to California, as well as Europe and Japan. Later in life, she was able to drive her mobility scooter to prayers and community events, assist in offices, greet guests as a Dooley Center receptionist, and keep up her outdoor ministry. Ever faithful in large ways and small, Sister Mary patrolled the monastery walkways, drives, and parking lots, bicycle flag waving behind her for safety, as she leaned over her scooter to pull weeds, rake leaves, and gather pecans and walnuts. We will miss her welcoming and adventurous spirit and her practical wisdom.



Oblate Bobbie Smith ✠

April 1, 1942 – February 13, 2026

By John Gioia, Oblate

We remember Oblate Barbara “Bobbie” Adney Smith, who passed away peacefully in Overland Park, Kansas on February 13, 2026. Bobbie and her husband, Frank, became oblates of Mount St. Scholastica in May 2002. Bobbie was a living testament to a Christ-shaped life, beautifully embodying the charisms of hospitality, faith, and family.

Deeply influenced by the Rule of St. Benedict, Bobbie shared wise and thoughtful insights during our oblate deanery discussions. She channeled her deep spiritual wisdom into developing and leading Benedictine

study groups within her church community. Bobbie served as a compassionate lay chaplain and communion minister, offering comfort, a ready ear, and a gentle presence to those facing struggles. She truly lived the charism of hospitality, graciously opening her home and kitchen each month to the Trinity oblate deanery.

Bobbie was a rare combination of “grace with no nonsense,” deeply encouraging, fiercely compassionate, and fully attentive to everyone. She faithfully followed the greatest commandment by living out her own beautiful piece of life advice, “Put love in all its forms into practice every moment of every day.”

Oblate Edie Snethen ✠

March 21, 1949 – June 21, 2026

Edie’s obituary begins by citing four hallmarks: faith, science, family, and service. She attended Lutheran churches throughout her life and was a pillar of her Benedictine oblate group that met in Topeka, Kansas. She also was a Souljourners graduate and served on its advisory board for several years, as well as on oblate planning committees. She was a groundbreaking female in science, asking for a chemistry set at an age when most girls wanted dolls, and she went on to

become one of the first female public works directors in the nation. She was deeply devoted to Don, her husband of 54 years, their two children and three grandsons. As for service, her activities ranged from restorative justice groups to promoting traditional storytelling to her spiritual formation group. She is a model for the way oblates spread Benedictine values to ever-widening circles.

Thank you Volunteers

for donating your time

Top: Laura Torres, who was with us for six weeks in the summer, was a big help to Sister Loretta McGuire in the bake house.

Upper and middle left: Benedictine College students visited on Earth Day and helped with some yard work.

Large center photo: Jack Benning helps Sister Barbara Smith in the Merrywood Community Garden.

Lower left: Oblates Kara Reed and Janet Paper volunteered at our spring clean-up day.

Bottom: Amy Warner, who volunteers at the Mount every month, helps the sisters shuck corn.



Would you like to volunteer at the Mount?

See our website at [mountosb.org/
walk-with-us/volunteer/](http://mountosb.org/walk-with-us/volunteer/)

or contact Sister Loretta McGuire
at lorettamc@mountosb.org for details



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