

# Tidings

BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF

ANNUNCIATION MONASTERY

FALL/WINTER 2011

[www.annunciationmonastery.org](http://www.annunciationmonastery.org)



Sister Rosemary DeGracia signs the profession document in the presence of Prioress Sister Nancy Miller and Sister Susan Lardy, Sister Agatha Muggli (far left) and the monastic community.

## An Interview with Sister Rosemary DeGracia

*Having completed her novitiate year of immersion into the life, prayer and tradition of the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery, Sister Rosemary DeGracia has taken the next step in her spiritual journey. On August 27, the sisters gathered to celebrate Sister Rosemary's first monastic profession.*

Sister Rosemary's interview continues on page 4 and 5.



MESSAGE FROM THE

# Prioress

**A**fter a very unusual summer, God has blessed us with gentle breezes, warm sunshine and even some colorful leaves this fall. Some of us wondered if the trees would turn color after such a summer. From the monastery, the view of the valley below has changed. It appears most of the trees have succumbed to the long weeks of standing in floodwater. They stand bare and tired after being submerged in water for many weeks. However, sprinkled among them are brilliantly colored trees that seem to shout, “I’m still here! I am alive and well!” Those trees remind us of our own rootedness, resilience, and faith in God’s plan for us. We continue to pray for those who face great challenges in the aftermath of the flood. May you find many unexpected blessings!

How happy we are to share our news of Sister Rosemary DeGracia making her first monastic profession. In this newsletter, she answers some questions about her experience over the past year and how it has readied her for her new ministry and a future with our monastic community. We also celebrated with Sisters Madelyn Louttit and Hannah Vanorny when they renewed their first monastic profession. Please join us in praying for these women who enrich our lives by sharing their faith and their many gifts.

In this newsletter, you will read about how some of our sisters have had the remarkable opportunity to go to Rome with students who attend the University of Mary Rome Campus. Our sisters are teaching them about the saints and our Christian, Catholic, Benedictine roots. I was also blessed to have this experience in early October; it was spiritually transformative and I am ever grateful.



Sister Nancy Miller and Sister Nancy Gunderson near the Vatican.

On behalf of the community, I want to say “thank you” to our friends who contributed to our sister’s recent retirement appeal. We are humbled by your generosity. We are grateful for your desire to assist us in moving our mission into the future!

I hope this issue of Tidings gives you a glimpse of our sisters’ rootedness, resilience and faith in God’s plan – like the colorful trees that proclaim God’s glory in challenging times. Please know you are always welcome to join us in prayer or to simply come and rest in God.

We are here for you, praying for you and your loved ones. God bless!

*Sister Nancy Miller, OSB*

Sister Nancy Miller, OSB



# Sisters, Students and Saints

The story is reminiscent of one that dates back over a hundred years when young Mother Benedicta Riepp traveled from Germany to America to teach the children of German immigrants and establish new Benedictine communities.

This time, Sisters of Annunciation Monastery traveled from “home to Rome” to impart the rich Benedictine heritage upon students at the University of Mary Rome campus. Last spring, Sister Hannah Vanorny accompanied a large group of students on their pilgrimage to Rome. In October Prioress Sister Nancy Miller joined the University of Mary’s first annual Rome Pilgrimage with the President’s Club members. Students are also benefiting from the knowledge and life experience of Sisters Thomas Welder and Nancy Gunderson. Sister Thomas taught a course on St. Benedict and Sister Nancy Gunderson remains in Rome, teaching a course on saints who continue to influence and guide the Church today.



*“To truly love and appreciate those who have gone before us helps us grow in wisdom and learn to live a holy life of purpose.”*



“Being educated and immersed in the culture of Rome while visiting holy sites is a learning opportunity of a lifetime. Each day brings discovery and an awakening of how the past and the future come together,” says Sister Nancy Gunderson. Her class “Saints of Rome” is comprised of lecture, research, journaling and exploration of ancient sacred sites. “I hope this experience transforms the students and encourages them to find friends among the saints,” says Sister Nancy. “To truly love and appreciate those who have gone before us helps us grow in wisdom and learn to live a holy life of purpose.” “Grazie,” to the saints who continue to bless the universal Church today.

Top Photo: Sister Nancy Gunderson met with Sister Helen Kilzer who taught her some basic Italian words and phrases.

Bottom Photo: Sister Nancy and Sister Thomas explored the city of Norcia, birthplace of St. Benedict and his twin sister, St. Scholastica.



Sister Susan Lardy and Sister Rosemary DeGracia share a joyful moment.

### **Sister Rosemary shares some insights about her journey:**

**Q: What was a typical day like in the novitiate?**

A: Days would shift according to the needs of the community and my class schedule. An ordinary day included the prayer schedule of the community, personal prayer, work in the monastery, classes and study and some recreation. The novitiate helped me make choices to find a balance between active and contemplative life. My work included assuming responsibility for the monastic library which will continue as one of my ministries.

**Q: What have you learned about yourself and the monastic community over the past year?**

A: I learned that having the ‘information’ about monasticism and the Rule of Benedict was different from formation in monasticism. I had been an oblate of an abbey in California for 15 years before moving to North Dakota and had much information, but living the monastic life as a secular is different from living in a monastic community on a daily basis. This called me into deep reflection on recognizing my limitations in formation and areas where I needed to grow. I still need to grow, that’s part of this journey.

In the monastic community, I had more opportunity to observe up close how the sisters assist each other in small ways – how interconnected our lives are. I became more aware of that element of ministry in the little things we do in service to one another. I was also surprised how much activity occurs around the monastery on a day-to-day basis!

I learned to be less self-sufficient and let others help me. This seemed odd as I had juggled family, work and ministry for many years. I learned that each sister has a piece of the wisdom of the community and that I had wonderful, talented resources from which to draw. I am encouraged by the depth of experience, vitality and faithfulness I observe in our sisters. All are committed for the long haul to service within the Church. Their commitment allows me to make a like commitment.

**Q: Is there a Benedictine value that holds particular significance for you?**

A: Hospitality comes to mind because it can be expressed in many ways. We exhibit hospitality to welcome Christ, to guests, to each other in monastic community and to all we encounter. It can be expressed through availability, in our presence and service to one another.

**Q: What would you say to a woman considering religious life? What excites you about the future?**

A: I have a great deal of hope for the future of religious life. By studying monastic history this past year, I have come to appreciate the ebbs and flows of religious vocations and realize that, like the Church, the Holy Spirit guides renewal and reconfiguration of the model of life, but the essential search for God remains constant.

For a woman considering religious life, I would urge perseverance in prayer and discernment, and I would tell her of the many gifts monastic life has to offer. A communal, as well as a personal, prayer life is an essential for me; the Liturgy of the Hours structures my day. There is excitement in how this life unfolds for me as I transition from the novitiate into ministry; I know that I do so with the daily support of all of my sisters.



Sister Rosemary lends a hand in the kitchen. She is pictured with two of our cooks, Valentina, and Jerry (background).

**Please continue to pray for Sister Rosemary in her new ministry as academic affairs associate at the University of Mary.**





## *Suffer or Surrender?*

By Sister Edith Selzler

**I**n May 2003 while I was teaching class, I began to feel extremely tired and suspected I had developed a bladder infection. A trip to the emergency room and a CT scan revealed much more. I saw the distress in Dr. Leingang's kind eyes as he sat at my side. I didn't let him say it, I did. "It's cancer, isn't it?" Was it ever: uterine, bladder, ovarian, colon, rectal and several lymph nodes along my spine. The next day, my surgeon said that potentially, I could have three good years. I'm moving into eight.

*"I found peace in a surrender to whatever would come; what would please God would please me."*

The months of chemo and radiation were painful and the outcome "iffy." And yet the uncertainty did not bother me. My comfort was in St. Paul's Letter to the

Philippians: "For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." I challenge his comment that he didn't know which to choose. Sorry, but there is no choosing on our part, God does that according to a plan of his own. I quit worrying about my future. I found peace in a surrender to whatever would come; what would please God would please me. That peace allowed me to relax and heal.

Most people have heard about the healing effects of the body's own production of endorphins and other hormones they stimulate that help the body heal itself. On the other hand, stress and fear might slow the healing process and trigger cancer cells to grow. I often hear people with good intentions telling those with cancer, "You've got to fight this!" The whole idea of "fighting" something increases pressure, tension and fear, which in turn, can make the body trigger the bad "stuff" to grow. Relaxing and envisioning the process of peaceful healing can actually create good endorphins in the body.



I found it much more helpful when friends brought me humorous books, DVDs and funny cards (not the flowery ones that look like sympathy cards). Thoughtful friends visited me on a particularly pain-filled day and played the harp and zither for me. I felt the music wash over me with refreshment and the pain just floated away. As a graced gift, the next day on TV, a music therapist talked of how our whole body is made of fibers or strings, and so stringed instruments can smooth out the knots and relax away pain.

Happiness and inner peace spur the production of endorphins – so does laughter, good belly shaking laughter. Years ago, Dr. Norman Vincent Peale promoted this “therapy,” finding his own cure by watching “Three Stooges” films and reading comic books. I spent many hours in the hospital bed watching sitcoms and reading hilarious books brought by my fabulous brother. Between May and September all the cancer disappeared, astonishing even the doctors.

*"suffering is "an inside job;" it's how you handle pain mentally and spiritually."*

Over time I developed a personal theory: pain and suffering are two different things. No one can escape pain completely, whether physical, mental or spiritual, or that pain which hurts the heart when loved ones experience harm or injury. But suffering is “an inside job;” it’s how you handle pain mentally and spiritually. You can give in to a “why me” disposition and build up some really bad body chemistry, or you can choose to leave things in God’s hands, trusting in his loving care in the midst of mystery. The ultimate model is Jesus in the Garden of Olives, asking his Father to remove the cup of suffering but still saying, “Not my will but yours be done.” Did he suffer physical pain? Most certainly! Jesus suffered most when he no longer felt like the Father’s loving hand was there for him and he gave in to fear.

After five years of being cancer free, I developed several nodes in each lung. The doctor prescribed a hormone that slows cancer growth so that chemo could be delayed. However, with each succeeding scan, more of the nodes simply disappeared until, within a year, they were all gone. The doctor and I sat mystified staring at the computer screen, laughing joyously. Grace and endorphins did their healing wonder.

*I stood.  
Watching frost-seared leaves  
spangle autumn hues  
in warm weathered winds.*

*One leaf made way.  
Lofting on gentle breezes,  
feathered its way  
past leaves limb-locked.*

*I thrilled  
in its capering descent  
sashaying its gentle way  
till quietly it curtsied,  
then earth-moored  
lay in stillness,  
waiting.*

*O Lord of all seasons  
May I be like that leaf  
Detached  
free-floating in your love  
trusting  
while lifted  
turned and tossed*

*To be gently laid to rest  
deep  
within you.*

*~Sister Michael Kaliher, osb*

# A Flood of Memories

It goes without saying that the summer of 2011 will long be remembered for the flooding of the Missouri River. There has also been a lot of talk about the Garrison Dam which brought back memories for two sisters who were nurses at the time of its construction. Sisters Madonna Wagendorf and Helen Kyllingstad cared for workers who were injured on the job. Here are some memories they shared about nursing during that interesting time in history.

When Sister Helen was asked to become administrator of Beulah's Hillcrest Hospital, she knew she faced a difficult mission. Running a small rural hospital would require long hours, creativity, energy and faith. And, if that weren't a big enough undertaking, she was also the hospital's only anesthetist. The hospital wasn't well equipped, nor was it clean. Dismayed over the unsightly stains on the baby garments, Sister Helen promptly brought them to Sister Stephen who was laundress at St. Alexius Medical Center at the time. "Most folks would have thrown out those awful garments, but Sister Stephen bleached and laundered them until they were white as snow!" She stood in disbelief when she saw wood floors in the operating room and had them replaced with a more sanitary, easy to clean linoleum.

Sister Madonna was in nurse's training at St. Alexius when her superior, Mother Decora, called her to help Sister Helen in Beulah. On a frigid January day, she set out on Mandan's train, "The Galloping Goose." It had so many mechanical problems Sister Madonna didn't arrive in Beulah until 2 a.m., long after the train depot had closed. A stranger helped her find a phone so she could call Sister Helen for directions to the hospital. Sister Madonna thought she could find her way by the

moon. "So I walked up the hill and followed the moon until I met Sister Helen," she says. They met each other on foot at 3 a.m. that dark winter night.

Sisters Helen and Madonna's stories always go back to the babies. How they loved the babies in their care. The early days of nursing required a lot of

creativity. Sister Helen explains, "We painted laundry baskets pink and blue for the babies and made incubators using light bulbs and hot water bottles for warmth." Both sisters scrubbed in before surgery over a bathtub while disinfectant was poured over their hands. "I used a 20-quart pressure cooker on the stove to sterilize all of the equipment," recalls Sister Helen.

Sister Madonna's biggest worry when she worked nights was the potential for fire. "Beulah was a mining town and whenever there was a healthy wind, the sparks and ashes would blow onto our rooftop," she says. "I always worried about the babies so I had a plan that if a fire broke out, I would have Sister Helen hand the babies to me through the window." Sister Madonna admits to spending a lot of time checking that rooftop.

The hospital had one oxygen tank that was to be shared. If a baby needed oxygen, the sisters would carry the baby to the tank on another floor. Without an elevator

to transfer patients, they would have to carry fully anesthetized patients up the narrow stairways to recovery after surgery.

Sister Helen learned to administer ether and chloroform from a country doctor. She remembers doing tonsilleotomies right in the doctor's office. Sister Madonna worked in Riverdale in 1947, a 35-bed government hospital that contracted with



Sisters Helen and Madonna, Hillcrest Hospital, Beulah, ND, 1948.



the sisters to operate it. A first aid station was located on the construction site during the day and the sisters took over at night. According to Sister Madonna, the most common injuries they treated were from welders who suffered flash burns or concrete burns.

"Once a nurse, always a nurse," fits for Sister Madonna and Sister Helen. They assist with situations requiring a nurse whenever they are called upon. Sister Madonna is semi-retired and does clerical work in medical records at Garrison Memorial Hospital. She also provides spiritual care and distributes communion to patients. Sister Helen makes beautiful greeting cards out of donated wallpaper books and creates stunning bouquets of the wild prairie grasses she collects as she rides around the monastery grounds on her electric cart. Both sisters love the outdoors and enjoy watching the wildlife on the prairie.



Sister Helen Kyllingstad and Sister Madonna Wagendorf were both nurses during the construction of the Garrison Dam.

## Learning New Translations of the Roman Missal



Sister Rebecca Mayer and Sister JoAnn Krebsbach.

Sister Rebecca Mayer and Sister JoAnn Krebsbach have been busy studying and comparing the new translations of the Roman Missal. They have been meeting with the monastic community to teach the changes that are being introduced in stages and will be fully implemented on the first Sunday of Advent.

Sister Rebecca wrote a beautiful chant setting of the "Gloria" that is in accord with the new Roman Missal. She created a masterpiece! The sisters appreciate her dedication to producing such an inspiring piece of music that is melodic and easy to sing!



## *My Ministry is to Love*

**B**ertha's face brightens when Sister Mariah Dietz knocks on her door. She is anxious to get started sewing strips of colorful fabric together to make potholders. She has been sewing since she was a teenager and would not be able to continue without a little help. With a cheerful hug and a "let's get started," Sister Mariah walks her to the sewing machine and together they begin pushing the fabric through the machine as they chat.

Sister Mariah's loving ministry as director of spiritual care supports the homey environment at St. Gabriel's Community, a long-term care facility in Bismarck.

"The people who live here are called guests. We want them to be happy, to be as independent as possible and to have choices."

Sister Mariah coordinates Mass, offers a Bible study and leads the daily rosary. "In the most basic sense, my job is to love these people, which I do! They are precious to me," she says. "I acknowledge their needs individually. One person may enjoy crafts so we craft together. Another may miss canning so we spend a day canning together. Others just want someone to talk, laugh or cry with them."

The staff and guests joke with one another like family members. One gentleman, Cy, reminds Sister Mariah that she accidentally added too many Hail Mary's in a decade while she lead the rosary one day. He chuckled and said, "She was really tired that day or maybe she just has a bad rosary." He adds, "She's a speed cop too -- she stops you if you pray too fast!"

Evelyn has lived at St. Gabriel's for almost a year. The sunlight streams cheerily through her large window, illuminating pictures of her family and her personal treasures. A nurse for 45 years, Evelyn has much in common with Sister Mariah, who is also a nurse. She says, "I enjoy reading in my room most of the time because I like the peace and quiet, but I never miss church or Sister Mariah's Bible study. Sister Mariah is wonderful; she visits people and she sits with them when they are so terribly sick."

Preparing people to go to God is another important part of Sister Mariah's ministry. She stays with them during their final hours and supports family members. "I have a sense of peace about death, knowing that when we die, life is not over, it's changed." A memorial service is offered when someone dies and the family and staff gather for a time of prayer and sharing of memories. "It's hard on the staff too; we get attached to the people who live here. The service is part of the healing process."



Top Photo: Sister Mariah and Bertha sew colorful potholders.

Bottom Photo: Sister Mariah and Evelyn share special time together.



“A holistic spiritual approach helps me be present to individuals who may be resistant or angry about something. It can be difficult at times to keep going back when things get hard. My job is to keep going back. Look at Jesus. He never gave up on people.”

With a few new colorful potholders completed, Sister Mariah tells Bertha it’s getting close to lunchtime. As they say goodbye, Sister Mariah hugs her, exclaiming, “Oh Bertha, I love you.” And Bertha says, “I love you too!”

Sister Mariah holds the “resurrection quilt,” a beautiful symbol of God leading a loved one to new life. This quilt is used to cover the body at the time of death. The quilt was made by Sister Rosemary DeGracia of Annunciation Monastery. When a guest is dying, Sister Mariah brings in a “grieving cart” of inspirational books, rosaries, a CD player and music, among other items that create a peaceful environment.



## Sister Mariah Honored

Sister Mariah Dietz was promoted to the rank of Professor Emerita in Nursing at the University of Mary “Honoring the Professoriate” ceremony on August 22. Congratulations Sister Mariah!



**Sister Neola Winter**

Born: July 12, 1921  
Professed: July 1, 1948  
Died: October 1, 2011

## *In Loving Memory*

### **Sister Neola Winter**

Sister Neola Winter had a ready smile and a heart full of gratitude for God and all the people in her life – her students, monastic community, family, friends and caregivers.

A teacher for 29 years, she loved children and encouraged them to read and to expand their minds. She taught elementary grades in Catholic schools in Mandan and Bismarck. She was the first principal of Christ the King school in Mandan. She served 20 years as librarian at St. Mary’s Grade School and three years at Cathedral Grade School. Sister Neola continued to share her love of reading as librarian at the monastery and in the library of the Diocese of Bismarck.

Sister Neola will be missed for her warm and joyful spirit, her delight in people and her deep faith in God. May she dwell forever in the loving embrace of God.

# A Joyful Spirit: Girls, God and Fun!

What fun the sisters had with this amazing group of girls who came for a day retreat to discover how God and friends enrich our lives. The girls joined the sisters for prayer, meals, crafts and s'mores on the balcony.



## Nun Run a Lot of Fun

Annunciation Monastery was the first overnight stop for a group of young women from Trinity High School, Dickinson. The "Nun Run" was led by Father Joshua Ehli and Deacon Gregg Hochhalter. The group visited monasteries from Bismarck to Chicago. They were welcomed to a tour of Annunciation Monastery, prayer, a presentation and visiting with the sisters. The next morning they enjoyed breakfast with the sisters before the next leg of their journey to explore of religious communities.





## Happy Harvest

(lt. to rt.) Sisters Delora and Frances Schweitzer, Sister Gemma Peters, Frances Fleckenstein (seated), Sister Donna Johnson, Sister Joseph Dukart and Sister JoAnn Krebsbach. The sisters are so grateful to all who shared their bountiful harvest!

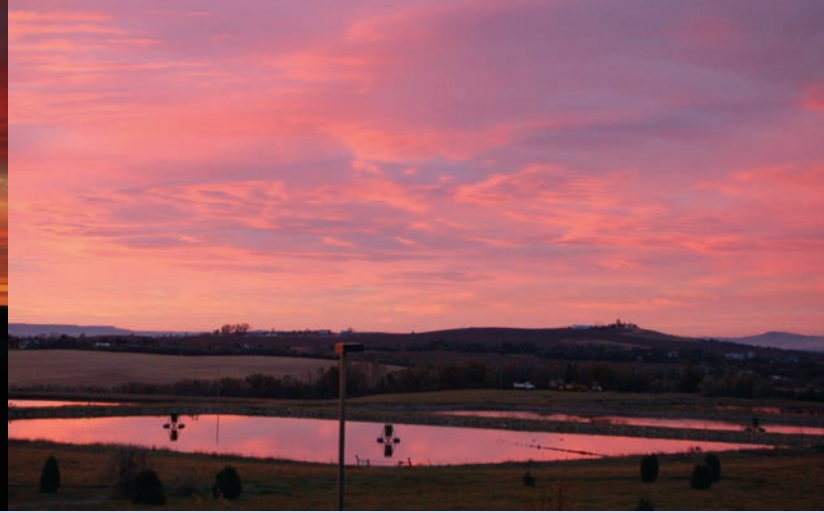


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## Thank You!

*Thank you to our generous friends who donated to our appeal for retired sisters. We are humbled by your desire to join us in thanking our retired sisters. God Bless you!*

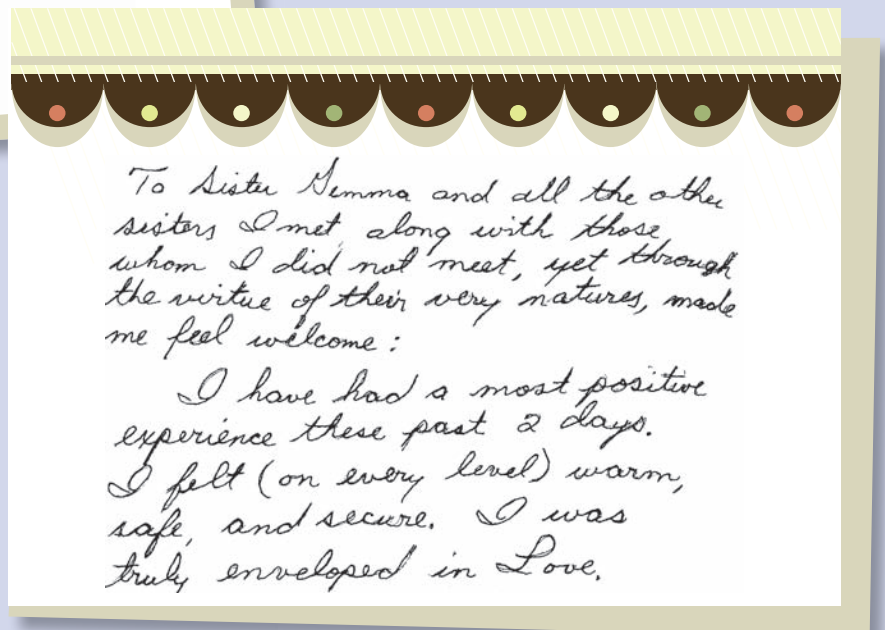
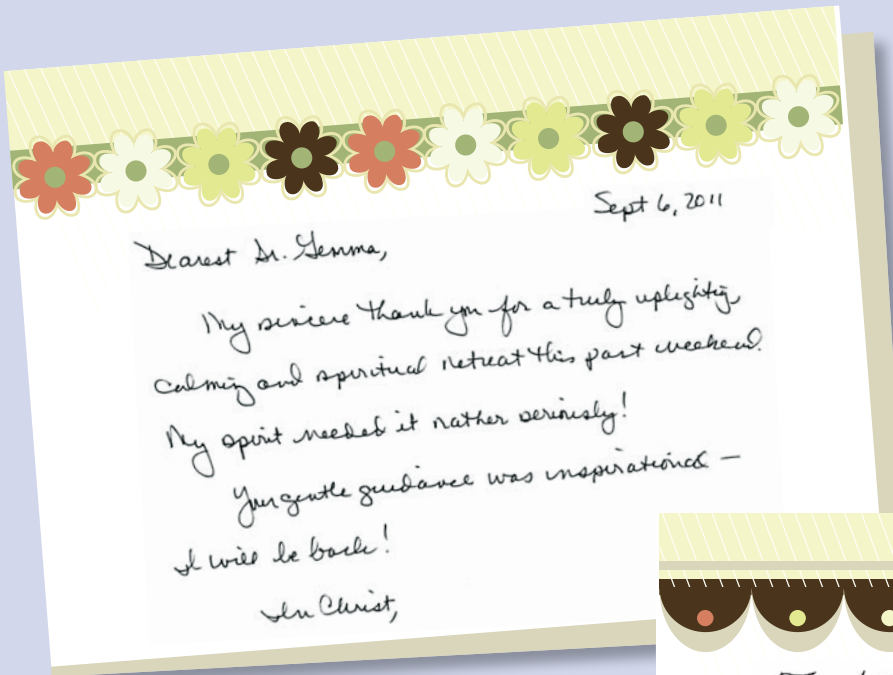




Both of these photos are from the same sunrise the morning of October 15, 2011. The bold, fiery reds, and oranges melted into gentle clouds of pink and lavender. The morning was still, a chill in the air, and the blessed assurance of God with us.

*"Be Still and Know I am God."*

*Psalm 46:10*



*Notes like these  
 warm our hearts!*





## Sisters Madelyn and Hannah Renew First Monastic Profession

Sister Susan Lardy, Sister Madelyn Louttit, Sister Hannah Vanorny and Sister Nancy Miller. Please keep Sisters Madelyn and Hannah in your prayers as they continue in their faith journey.

On September 25, Sisters Madelyn Louttit and Hannah Vanorny renewed their first monastic profession during Evening Prayer. Prioress Sister Nancy Miller offered this prayer in blessing to them: *“Blessed are you, Lord our God. You have called Sister Madelyn and Sister Hannah into the life of prayer, lectio, service and self-giving within this community of the Annunciation. May we, with Sister Madelyn and Sister Hannah, be renewed with holy passion and seek to be possessed by your divine presence so that our lives may be the fulfillment of your will. Bring us all together to life everlasting. All honor and glory to you, Lord our God, now and forever. Amen.”*

## Welcome Oblate Helen Geinert

Helen Geinert became an oblate of Annunciation Monastery on October 2. She was presented the Rule of St. Benedict and will be supported in her faith journey by our sisters. May Helen, and all of the oblates of Annunciation Monastery, find joy and fulfillment as we seek God together.

Sister Stephanie Dolyniuk, assistant oblate director, and Sister Patricia Schap, oblate director, with new oblate, Helen Geinert, and Sister JoAnn Krebsbach, subprioress.



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If you are interested in making a donation in support of our ministries, please use the enclosed envelope. Thank you. Please remember us when making or revising your will. Our legal name is: Benedictine Sisters of the Annunciation, B.M.V. For more information, contact Jill Ackerman, director of communications and development, (701)355-8907 or: [jill@annunciationmonastery.org](mailto:jill@annunciationmonastery.org)

## Vocation Live-In Opportunities

Is God's voice tugging at your heart?  
Do you long to seek God with others and live a life of prayer and service?

Please consider attending one of our upcoming Vocation "Come & See" Live-Ins:

**November 19 – 20, 2011**

**January 14 - 15, 2012**

**March 24 – 25, 2012**



*We'd love to meet with you and explore where God is calling you!*

Spend 24 hours at Annunciation Monastery and join us for prayer, meals, sharing and fun. Enjoy a comfortable room and the peaceful surroundings of Annunciation Monastery as you learn more about Benedictine, monastic life.

There is no charge. Please pre-register. For more information, please call Sister Gerard, director of vocation ministry, (701) 355-8909 or e-mail: [vocations@annunciationmonastery.org](mailto:vocations@annunciationmonastery.org)