

Benet Hill Monastery The Review

Volume 63, No. 2



Letter

from the prioress

Dear Friends,

Our chosen theme for this past liturgical year has been *Doing Hope and Letting Love Flow*. This theme was inspired by a reflection from Sister Theresa Carroll, a Benedictine Spiritual Director graduate from Australia, Pope Francis' theme for Jubilee 2025, *Pilgrims of Hope*, and by our community's study of *Fear and Faith: Hope and Wholeness in a Fractured World* by Daniel P. Horan, OFM.

This past year, I have become so aware of how joy is deeply linked with hope, and this realization has culminated in the selection of this year's theme, *Awaken Joy*.

I have experienced joy this year, not because hardships haven't occurred (they have!), but because I have deliberately chosen to hope each day. Maria Pascuzzi, CSJ wrote in a recent article, "I think everyone would agree that if we hope to live joyfully, we cannot hitch our joy to the way things were... While joy embraces the contingency of life, it must be rooted in something beyond a specific set of social circumstances or expected outcomes."

We find in scripture the theme of rejoicing, intertwined with hope and faith, where believers are encouraged to find joy even in suffering and hardship. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in your faith, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may overflow with hope." Is it possible to be filled with joy and peace before we are filled with hope? Yes, Paul says, if our joy and peace are firmly rooted in our faith.

When I am feeling particularly hopeless, I often listen to music. It's music that lifts me and helps me to reground myself in my faith and

in the choice of hope. One week, when declining health and physical pain was afflicting the bodies and spirits of my sisters and the world was suffering from violence, I purposely selected a song with these lyrics by Kathy Sherman, CSJ:

"You (God) and I, we share life, together we have been, and we will be. My life is yours. You have sweetened all my joys; you've brought comfort in my pain."

These words lifted me up and, at the same time, grounded me in the faithful presence of God in my life. They awakened joy within me to face another day with an open heart. They helped me to recall my deep faith in God's presence and empowered me to choose hope once again.

Pascuzzi wrote, "Joy, rooted in God's faithfulness and power to do a new thing, acknowledges loss, pain, anger, and grief. But joy is resistant to the cynicism that can too often accompany loss. Joy is, instead, a willful decision to focus on God's presence in every circumstance of life, whether the dramatic or mundane, the favorable or unfavorable, and to rejoice fully

in the gift of that

presence."



The 2025 Assembly Theme for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Vowed and lay leaders of religious women institutions from around the world gathered to listen, learn, and give witness to the collective work of religious women who serve God and all creation.

Spiritual teacher Eckhart Tolle wrote this piece of wisdom that I've intentionally etched on my heart and return to again and again: "The joy of being, which is the only true happiness, cannot come to you through any form, possession, achievement, person or event – through anything that happens. That joy cannot come to you ever. It emanates from the formless dimension within you, from consciousness itself and thus is one with who you are."

I want to close with the words of another song by Sherman that I often sing to myself as I am thinking over my day and surrendering to the blessing of sleep.

"In the silence, the sacred silence, I feel your embrace, for a moment we are one. With unspeakable joy, I love these moments so unlike all the rest." My prayer for you is that this joy of being, that is deep within you and endures through loss and pain, be a beacon of light in dark times. May you find courage in God's presence. May you hold fast to your faith by trusting in God's promises. May you awaken to joy and be a catalyst of hope and joy for all you meet.

You, my friends, have been that catalyst of awakened joy to me and our community through your presence in our lives. You have shown us God's presence through your goodness, many kindnesses and generosity. Thank you.

S. Main There Summers DIB

Sister Marie Therese "MT" Summers, OSB **Prioress**



Watch the assembly keynote address by Father James Martin, SJ

 Sisters Jan Ginzkey, Justice Promoter, and MT Summers, Prioress and Ruth Roland, Communicator, at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) in Atlanta, August 12 – 15, 2025



Benet Hill Oblates of 2024-2025

n Sunday, July 13, 2025, the sisters warmly welcomed new oblates into the Benet Hill Community. After a lovely, meaningful liturgy of oblation, the oblates and their families joined the sisters and Oblate Leadership Team for a delicious meal in the dining room.

Oblates of St. Benedict offer themselves for service to God and others. By integrating prayer and work, they manifest Christ's presence in the world through their own families, friends, and work relationships. The oblates also form a community among themselves and the sisters.

The Benedictine values that professed Benedictines (like the Sisters of Benet Hill) and Benedictine Oblates follow in their daily life include:

Prayer Community

Stability

Obedience

Conversatio (the way of formation and transformation)

Discipline Humility Love of Christ and neighbor Care of Creation Hospitality



Learn more about Benet Hill oblates



New Oblates with Oblate Leadership Team. Left to right, Jerry O'Hare, Pam Kestner, Krista Dias, Jennifer Kincheloe, Brandon Smith, Tyler Hill, Cynthia Kramer, Raechal Friess, Ann Gardner, Ellen Haroutunian, Jesse Brown

In following these values, those who follow the Benedictine way seek to live so that in all things God may be glorified.



New Oblates with Sister Clare Carr (left) and Sister Marie Therese "MT" Summers (right)

A Reflection on the Oblate Program

s a pastor, schoolteacher, and chaplain, I've found deep spiritual friends in books. As a child and youth, I was a Bibliophile. Books were a therapy for my soul as I wrangled through a difficult childhood. My reading was ever drawn towards theology, and I met the likes of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley. Thomas Merton introduced me to the Trappists, and I found in them something entirely other. They were different, like me. They'd much rather spend time thinking, serving, praying, and reading than anything else, and they seemed to be experiencing what I now call living in the Kingdom of Heaven, here on earth.

The world is a dastardly hellscape to me without the Kingdom of Heaven. As much as I have learned to be mindful, rather than religious, I still find that the multitudes don't seem to be much of either. For me, I am often labeled liberal by the right, and conservative by the left. I'm certainly a mongrel in my Christianity. I enjoy where I've landed as an Elder in the Methodist Church, but I came from pure fundamentalism, and I remain a resident of the American South. I'm guite certain that if I had been born Catholic, I would be a priest or a monk, but I am married and happily so. I am often quite glad I was never Catholic to begin with.

St. Benedict was introduced to me by the Benet Hill Monastery sisters. Although I was aware of *The Rule* of Benedict and vaguely aware of the word oblate, it was the monastery's website that drew me in. Here was a group of sisters who didn't wear habits, had been schoolteachers like me, and who live in an Evangelical Mecca. Not only that, but they have an oblate program online and have online Spiritual Director classes as well. These are some impressive individuals.

By Brandon Smith, ObloSB



Brandon Smith and family

Before I became an Oblate Novice at Benet Hill Monastery, I had never heard of Sister Joan Chittister and Father Richard Rohr, both surely heretics even in my current circles. But Sister Clare and my cohort together unpacked the rule, and I was changed by it. The Rule of Benedict has taught me how to be grounded in a place, committed to service and justice, and how to live and build communities of believers that do all three. I found at Benet Hill, not a group of leftist nuns on some secret mission to convert me to Catholicism, but what is dreadfully missing in our dialogue and culture today: deep, sincere, and intelligent people who love God, Jesus, and one another, and who are seeking to serve all.

To me, being an Oblate is just that: being deeply sincere, thoughtful and in love with God, Jesus, and one another, and seeking to serve all. Making my oblation was a commitment to this way, the Benedictine Way. I call this way simply The Gospel Way.

Online Benedictine Spiritual Direction

By Sister Mary Colleen Schwarz, OSB

"We say YES to the future as a contemporary Benedictine monastic presence that continues to bring hope and healing to the world."

- Sister Marie Therese Summers, OSB Prioress

In January 2025, the online Benedictine Spiritual Direction Program started a new first year cohort, along with second year students for a combined total of 70 students. Graduates from the United States live in Colorado, Wisconsin, Kansas, Tennessee, Arkansas, Virginia, New York, New Jersey, California, Florida, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Missouri, Texas, Oregon, Louisiana, Illinois, Indiana, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky and Washington. International graduates reside in Thailand, Europe, Australia, Canada, Africa, China, and Malaysia.

Our Benedictine spirituality and values of hospitality, community, humility, reverence, stewardship, discernment, and integration are the transformational pillars that help cultivate a contemplative way of living for the students. We aspire to open their heart to the receptivity of God's love. These values align with the monastery's Strategic Vision Framework which includes our charism, mission, values, and vision.

The 2025 graduates walked their transformational path with commitment. This requires each student to know their own "spiritual heart," to know what creates compassion within them, and to know the area of their lives which blocks the pathway to God. The process of self-discovery is used to uncover each student's spiritual story. They are guided to listen to their inner voice of wisdom. The gifts of this journey are cultivating a more compassionate heart, learning to see God in everything, and listening to self and others with their spiritual heart. Their spiritual heart is where internal wisdom makes its home and illuminates life's graced moments, thus freeing them to love more authentically.

We flourish by being planted in the soil of God's universal love. We are called to love people whom we never would have normally chosen. Our Benedictine values reach out to those who are often difficult to love, those who are hurt and wounded, and those whose attractiveness and beauty may be hidden at first sight. We are called to embody God's love for the seemingly unlovable and for the unlovable parts of ourselves. God's love is a gift that is limitless and precedes us. It sustains us and calls us along the path of life.

This way of seeing the world is interwoven into the fabric of the Benedictine Spiritual Direction program. It is in this online community that the students slowly trusted being vulnerable and transparent to the other students. This community enriched and changed their interior soul landscape to embrace the journey toward universal love.

Throughout the year, the 2025 graduates broke open my heart in ways that allowed Spirit to infuse such gratitude for their presence in my life. Their spiritual practices expanded their Christ consciousness to see God in everything and to bear joy in life. I witnessed their faithfulness and commitment to doing their inner work. I observed as they were compassionate listeners, shared heart wisdom, accepted without judgement, and prayed.

These graduates know that Benedictine values change lives, hearts, and how we live the Gospel. There is nothing more important for human beings then to learn to live in harmony with God's love! In this final year, the graduates generously shared their heart

wisdom with the people they companioned in their student practicum, creating a soul space where wounded hearts were embraced with universal love and acceptance. This soul space was infused with hope, which creates that next action step in faith: to lead with love. They know of hope because the Spirit revealed it to them in their session so that they left with feelings of hope, healing, and promise.

It Is a profound honor to present to you the graduating class of 2025! The graduates are exceptional spiritual directors who gave the people they directed this year a sense that they are not alone. Rather, they are deeply loved by God.



Learn about the Online Benedictine Spiritual Direction Training and Certification Program







Reflection on the Benedictine Spiritual **Direction Program**

hen I entered the Spiritual Direction program at Benet Hill, I thought I was simply following a curiosity. What I encountered, however, was a profound and deeply transformative journey. Through classes, my cohort, my spiritual director, and especially my spiritual companion, layers of my shadow self began to unravel.

I see now that this program was not only about my inner journey but also about my vocation in the world. My work in international development and democracy promotion has always been outward facing, but the formation I received at Benet Hill gave me the contemplative depth, the courage, and the language of discernment for my public work.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Global Center for Rehumanizing Democracy, the think tank I am now establishing, is directly born of my training here. Its mission is to bring contemplation and deep reflection into politics, to restore dignity, trust, and moral imagination to public life.

By Jacob Udo-Udo Jacob



Jacob speaking at the Athens Democracy Forum, October 2, 2025.

In Isaiah's vision, the nations stream to the mountain of the house of the Lord, firmly established on the hill. In the same way, I see nations longing for renewal, seeking a deeper and more contemplative grounding.

The task before me is to help bring the contemplation, deep listening, and spiritual renewal I received in the program into politics and public life. Every thread of the spiritual direction program—the contemplative practices, the honesty with self, the courage to face shadow, the capacity to listen deeply—has become the framework for how I now approach my public work. This program has prepared me for that next assignment. Every line of my life's story seems to converge here.

2025 Benedictine Spiritual Direction Graduates



Jeannine Aberg-Maes (Colorado)



Kelly Adamson



Sister Anne Madeleine Brost, OSB (Colorado)



Barbara Cantara (Arkansas)



Sister M. Laura Cathcart, OSB (Arkansas)



Mary Kay Chavez (Kansas)



Rev. Kelly J. Crocker (Wisconsin)

Anselma Dolcich-Ashley



(Indiana)





Sue Evanicky (Kansas)



Thomas Joseph Nicholas Farrell (New York)



(Washington)

eart of God—you will not be the same



Dean Joel Kayser (lowa)

David Hlebain



Melinda Keiner-Rummel (Kentucky)



Jennifer Longtin (Colorado)



Rev. Judith F. Lyons (California)



In times of crisis, there's a strange power at work an opportunity to rebuild the moral infrastructure that connects democratic systems to the human values and relationships that give them legitimacy."

Dan J. Emig (Colorado)

2025 Benedictine Spiritual Direction **Graduates**



Mary Markham (Wisconsin)

part of our shared stories and as gifts to offer the world



Darcy Spellman (Arkansas)



Monica Masso-Rivette (Ohio)



Laurette Stang California)



Kate Massy-Greene Thailand)



Jacob Udo-Udo Jacob (United Kingdom)



Rev. Mr. Randy J. Ortiz



Marvbeth Ulrich (Rhode Island)

Mark Wallace

(New York)



Velicia Passaro Florida)



Time and time again I felt God's unconditional love... lirection training program at Benet Hill.



Sarah Probst Miller

(Illinois)

cherishing. The beauty experienced continues to resonate in my soul and blossom outward to the world.



Deborah M. Reidv (Florida)



Mary Schwaner (Virginia)



Kelly Walsh (Colorado)

gnificantly deepened my understanding of my identity s a child of God.



Tracy Wilson (New York)

Fasting, and Advocacy

100 Days of Prayer,

By Sister Jan Ginzkey, OSB, **Justice Promoter**





e sisters joined with religious women across the country in observing May 29 – September 5, 2025, as days of prayer, fasting, and advocacy. This action was in response to an ongoing shift in national and global values and priorities away from recognizing the inherent dignity of each human being and caring for our common home, Earth. As professed Benedictine religious women, we are called to embody these and other Gospel values.

We are thankful for those in our broader community who joined in our prayer and fasting. Many signed into

Virtual Prayer Services on July 4th (for our nation) and August 6th (on the

> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima / Nagasaki for the elimination of nuclear weapons). Others attended one of the three community prayer services on the Feast Day of Mary Magdalene on July 22nd and others chose to fast a meal or eat

For our advocacy action, we chose to focus on food insecurity.

simply when possible.

We reached out to three area nonprofit organizations to ask what they were experiencing and what they needed due to funding cuts that are already weakening the basic safety net for the vulnerable. We continue to visit, email and call our elected representatives to advocate for a return of funding, and we invited our broader community into this effort.

And once again, you responded! We toured Food to Power's Farm, Free Fresh Grocery and Composting operation in the historic Hillside neighborhood. (Note: we continue to explore ways that area gardeners,

hunters, and chicken raisers can collaborate with Food to Power). We implemented a Last Sunday collection of underwear, deodorant and canned protein sources to stock the shelves at Westside CARES. Five members of our Sunday worship community participated in ReThinking Poverty: A Community Simulation,

sponsored by **Tri-Lakes Cares** and then shared their experience and learning in a panel discussion in September.

Our work to restore justice for the most vulnerable and to care for all creation continues. We are grateful that you are walking beside us on this journey.









uring the

liturgical

season called

the Season

of Creation

to Oct 4).

(September 1

By Sarah Groh, Liturgist



Peace wire Creation we bring the SEASON OF CREATION trees inside to contemplate our relationship with our Creator and creation. We

surround ourselves with the changing leaves of yellow and orange, sing songs of water and life, and recognize that we couldn't live without the beautiful elements of nature. Both our relationship with God and creation are rich topics for contemplation. The Season of Creation reminds us that these relationships are pure gifts which we are called to care for with loving intention.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he writes, "There is only Christ, who is all and in all." During the Season of Creation, we open our hearts by contemplating, listening, reading, feeling, serving, and changing to see the true depth of how much God adores us and all of creation. We experience the connection of our faith to creation more deeply by singing antiphons, reciting prayers, and hearing songs that encourage us to listen to and observe that which is Christ, who is all and in all.

By embracing God's creation by bringing the trees inside, our faith is disrupted. Will our faith evolve in a way that says yes to Christ's call yet again in a new way? After twenty years of living nestled up against the majestic Rocky Mountains, do we take God's handiwork of 1 billion years for granted? How do we use water, the symbol of our baptism? Do we use water in such a way that it will be conserved for generations to come? The Season of Creation gives us a time to grow in gratitude for God and creation each year.

To close the season, we bring our pets and farm animals to be blessed on the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi (Oct 4). These beloved creatures exemplify God's unconditional love and companionship.

Then, we rest! We worship in Ordinary Time for eight weeks until the last feast day of the Christian liturgical year, Christ the King. On this Sunday, we recognize Jesus the Christ as the king above all earthly kings and remember his teachings to the world. The very next Sunday, we say *Happy New Year* to the new Christian liturgical year and the Season of Advent.

The transforming experience of the Season of Creation invites us into Advent, a time of waiting and preparation, when we read familiar scripture stories of John and Elizabeth, Mary and Joseph, and the promised fulfillment and birth of the Prince of Peace. We must not rush this time, for it is a time to nurture patience and look forward to celebrating the Birth of Christ. Once again, we will bring the trees inside, this time for Christmas!

The life we choose as Christians is one of hope and life-giving decisions and yet sometimes, we find it hard to be joyful. Our theme for the 2025-2026 liturgical year, **Awaken Joy**, is intended to help us experience joy more fully in our hearts and lives. In song and scripture, communion and communication, work and play, and through our relationships with each other, let us Awaken Joy! Our Creator waits within.

I invite you to find a different way to express your waiting by serving, singing in the Schola, bringing friends on Sunday, and sharing your happy or difficult news in prayer. The journey from Season of Creation to the Season *of Advent* is the transforming journey of each follower of Jesus. Reach Sarah at liturgy@benethillmonastery.org



Come Into the Quiet... and Awaken Joy!

By Sally Rothstein, Director of Operations



A Sacred Place to Call Home

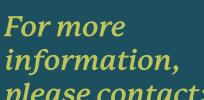
N estled among the tranquil ponderosa pines of Black Forest, the Sanctuary of Peace offers a rare opportunity to live in harmony with creation, just minutes from the heart of Colorado Springs.

This special community is inspired by the spirit of simplicity, sustainability, and sacred space that defines the vision of Benet Hill Monastery. Thoughtfully designed paired patio homes invite a lifestyle of balance, reflection, and connection—with both nature and community.

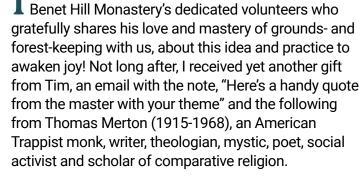
Enjoy the ease of maintenance-free living with snow removal, landscaping, and exterior upkeep provided. Step outside to 45 acres of treed open space with trails and gathering places, or relax indoors with comforts such as:

- Main-level primary suite and living areas
- Gourmet kitchen with quartz countertops, induction range, convection oven, maple cabinets, and stainless steel fridge
- Gas fireplace, wood flooring, covered patio or deck
- Refrigerator, washer, and dryer included
- Tankless water heater and high-efficiency furnace and A/C

Only 11 residences remain available in this unique development. If you or someone you know has ever dreamed of living in a home that reflects the values of simplicity and reverence for creation, we warmly invite you to explore this opportunity.







was recently sharing with Tim Cooper, one of

Do not look for rest in any pleasure, because you were not created for pleasure: you were created for joy. And if you do not know the difference between pleasure and joy you have not yet begun to live.

- Thomas Merton

Reading this quote immediately invoked a pause, and I found myself noodling even more deeply about my own understanding of joy. Reflecting on pleasure and joy, inspired by Merton's wisdom, led me to clarity that, when experiencing joy there's a sweet quality of connection with a deepest presence. An alignment with the divine.

As sweet as joy is, it is also at times illusive. We know it, we love the experience and yet can also be challenged with being in and living from joy. Joy, it seems, is a practice and a practice can start with a "mini retreat" – dedicated time with a few simple questions, a candle, and a journal, perhaps.

- What do I notice about my own joy?
- Are there certain experiences or conditions that facilitate my connection with this sweet divine energy?
- · When do I more easily let myself experience joy?

- What tends to impede my joyful connection with the divine energy?
- Why is experiencing joy important to me?
- · How does connecting with joy support me in my life?

Merton was inspired by Sufi mysticism, and a poem by 14th century Sufi mystic poet, Hafiz, especially inspires me in this exploration of joy, "Awake Awhile." A favorite singer-songwriter and his wife, David Wilcox and Nance Pettit, have a beautiful CD project called "Out Beyond Ideas, songs for peace project." One of the many stunning songs is "Awake My Dear," and uses these lines from Hafiz' poem:

Awake my dear Be kind to you sleeping heart Take it out into the vast fields of light And let it breathe



What soul-touching poetry and music might you integrate into your joy practice?

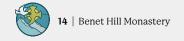
Scan the code to take a listen.

If you're like so many who find joy in nature, we welcome you to come into the quiet of Benet Hill Monastery and awaken your joy in the company of the peaceful Ponderosa pines, steadfast in their gentle presence in the surrounding forest. Whether for an afternoon or a retreat stay, you might identify a meaningful intention for inspiring and cultivating joy ... and take a next step to deepen your practice of connecting even more mindfully with your joyful spirit.



Interested in retreating at Benet Hill Monastery?





Benet Hill Academy Reunion

he weekend of July 18 – 20, the sisters welcomed back their former students for the annual reunion weekend at Benet Hill Monastery. The retired educators were thrilled to see still familiar faces and to hear stories of families, careers, loves, and even losses. It was truly

wonderful to have so many alumnae sitting together at Sunday worship. Thank you to all the alumnae who helped to plan the reunion and attended!

Next up is the Benet Hill Academy Class of 1976 reunion on the weekend of July 17 – 19, 2026. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend.

Do we have your current email and phone number? We want to stay in touch with you! Email Ruth Roland, Director of Mission Advancement, at rroland@benethillmonastery.org Thank you!



Class of 1975

Left to Right; Front Row: Cindy (Canty) Johannes Second Row: Lisa Muehlbauer, Terri (Harlow) English, Kathy (Ortiz) Wright

Third Row: Tricia (Langley) Boatner, Gail (Withey) Miskho, Kippy (Throckmorton) Gibeau

Fourth Row: Kimberlee (Gray) Lien, Linda (Szaley) King

Fifth Row: Vicky (Davis) Porter, Linda (Sousa) Douglas Sixth Row: Kathy (Gentile) Thirkell, Robin (Dingwell) Jewell







Seeking God in the Daily Celebration of Life

We pray for those who have lost loved ones

Compiled by Sister Lucile Hartmann, OSB





Sister Therese O'Grady and the O'Grady Family Cousin, Gary O'Grady

"He and his two sons visited a couple years ago. Before coming, he asked if we served 'adult beverages,' so I told Sister MT. She served him prune juice! He had deep faith and loved to talk about our Irish heritage. He had stories about our family I never heard of! I will miss our phone calls. He is resting in peace."



Sister Margaret Meaney and the Kelleher Family Nephew, John Kelleher

"He was an educator and world traveler, and is greatly missed."



Sister Margaret Meaney and the Meaney Family Nephew, Kristopher Meaney

"He was a sweet and artistic soul who created transitory art. He is deeply missed."

The Havens and Barnett Families
Rhonda (Havens) Barnett, Benet Hill Academy '72



The Farrell and Neice Families Leslie (Farrell) Neice, Benet Hill Academy '75

Agnes (O'Donnell) Johnson, Benet Hill Academy '70 and Denise O'Donnell, Benet Hill Academy, '74

Sister, Mary C. O'Donnell



Explore memorial service and columbarium options at Benet Hill Monastery.



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The Review

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