



The AMERICAN MONASTIC NEWSLETTER

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The mission of the American Monastic Newsletter is to be an instrument of communication and information for monastic communities in the Benedictine tradition in North America, members of the American Benedictine Academy, and other interested persons.

ABA Convention Goes Virtual

Due to the number of events scheduled for this summer (to make up for time lost due to the pandemic) and the skyrocketing cost of travel, the American Benedictine Academy board has decided that the in-person meeting scheduled for Schuyler, Nebraska, July 7-10, is not feasible. Therefore, the presentations and business meeting will be offered online and free of charge on Saturday, July 9. The schedule is as follows:

Give Me a Word ... July 9, 2022 via Zoom

10:30 a.m. (Eastern)/7:30 a.m. (Pacific):

Sister Laura Swan, OSB – *“The World of the Desert Ascetics”*

12:30 p.m. (Eastern)/9:30 a.m. (Pacific):

Rev. Dr. Donald Richmond, Oblate – *“The Fool with Words”*

2:30 p.m. (Eastern)/11:30 a.m. (Pacific):

Sister Mary Forman, OSB – *“Give me a word ... Lectio divina and the Sayings and Lives of the Desert”*

4:30 p.m. (Eastern)/1:30 p.m. (Pacific):

ABA Business Meeting (current members only)

Details about the presenters and their topics are in the previous two issues of this newsletter, available on the website: americanbenedictine.org.

Registration is required in order to receive the link. Contact the ABA secretary, Julie Ferraro, at ABAcadSec@gmail.com.

Video recordings, as well as audio CDs and digital mp3 files, will be available for purchase after the convention. Order forms will be on the website and advertised in the next issue of this newsletter.

President's Message

Dear ABA Members and Friends,

I write this, my last column as president of the ABA, from beautiful Glenstal Abbey in Ireland. Many of you have been here, I am sure. I am privileged to count one of the monks among my friends, and it was at his invitation that I decided to visit. I was also eager to visit because the abbey is a member of the Congregation of the Annunciation, as is my "own" monastery (where I am an oblate) – St. Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, California. My visit has been delightful, with beautiful weather (especially for Ireland), the amazing grounds of the abbey, a wonderful group of folks staying alongside me in the guest house and, of course, visiting with Father Fintan and the community. If you have not been here, you should make every effort to visit. It will be well worth the time and expense.

This trip to England and Ireland was supposed to be the first of several trips for me this summer, with the remainder being domestic trips for work and to visit family. One of those trips, of course, was to be to the St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska. Unfortunately, the post-Covid landscape and/or high inflation and exorbitant gas prices caused many ABA members to rethink a trip to the first in-person ABA convention since 2018's gathering at Saint Benedict's Monastery in Minnesota. Thus, most of us will now stay at home and gather via Zoom for our one-day convention. We have had a great response to our change-of-plans announcement and dozens of you have asked for the link(s). We are glad for this, and

happy that our three speakers will still be able to deliver their excellent talks.

However, I must confess, it has been a disappointment for me. I was eager (if selfishly) looking forward to seeing many of you in person. My very first course at St. John's School of Theology was with Sister Mary Forman, whom I have not seen in years. I was looking forward to an in-person reunion. For the two years of my presidency, I have only been able to meet with the ABA board virtually and was hoping to spend time with these wonderful people face to face, including meeting the ABA's new secretary, Julie Ferraro, for the first time. And, like many of you, I enjoy visiting new monasteries and new places and was keen on spending a few days in Schuyler, meeting Father Joel and the other monks of Christ the King Priory. Knowing that none of that would transpire has been a bit of a bitter pill to swallow.

But, as always, Benedict's regula speaks to my disappointment: "deny oneself in order to follow Christ" (4.10) and "prefer nothing to the love of Christ" (4.21). Chapter 4 is my favorite chapter, assuming one can have a favorite chapter of the Rule. The short, pithy statements get right to the point, containing a wealth of monastic wisdom in only a few words. Denying ourselves, says Benedict, is for the end of following Christ and preferring him above all things. Thus, I realized my need not to experience the aforementioned good of gathering in-person as being denied to me by some "force" or set of circumstances outside of my control (though that may be true to some degree), but instead to reorient myself so as to deny myself these otherwise good things. That is, I needed to go from a passive orientation of "woe is me; I cannot believe we will not gather in person" to an active orientation of "this stinks, but how can I follow Christ in this and prefer him above all else?" I know that Benedictine monastics do this every day; or, perhaps they are supposed to as faithful followers of the Rule. But, like many of you, I am still learning these sometimes hard, but always true lessons from our holy Father Benedict. I will miss seeing you all in Schuyler, but know that following and preferring Christ is far better.

Peace, and thank you for allowing me to serve you as ABA president these past two years.



The AMERICAN MONASTIC NEWSLETTER

Submit any announcements or articles to:

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For all address changes, membership payments, or any other ABA business, please contact the ABA secretary:

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The American Monastic Newsletter is published three times per year and it, as well as other ABA information, may be read online at:

www.americanbenedictine.org

Greg Peters

ABA president

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CANON LAW COLUMN

Changes to the Code of Canon Law by Pope Francis in 2022

This year Pope Francis has made several changes to canons that affect religious in certain aspects, e.g., exlaustration, dismissal, and brothers as superiors. It is not an overall change to the law concerning religious. Nevertheless, it does reflect an important view of the mind of the Holy Father.

This short column will be a simple overview of these changes, most of which occurred in February. One more change happened in May. The Holy Father said these changes were aimed at fostering a healthy decentralization in the life of the Church and I, for one, appreciate his approach.

The February changes were published by the Holy Father in an Apostolic Letter issued “*motu proprio*” (on his own accord), entitled *Competentias quasdam decenere* – “Introducing Changes to Some Norms of the Code of Canon Law.”

In the introductory paragraphs to the *motu proprio*, Pope Francis wrote that these changes correspond to “the dynamic of ecclesiastical communion and enhances proximity.” He also said that these changes are “meant, above all, to foster the sense of collegiality and pastoral responsibility on the part of . . . Major Superiors . . . but also to respect the principles of reasonableness, effectiveness and efficiency.”

“These changes reflect more clearly the Church’s shared and pluralistic universality, which embraces differences without leveling them. . . . At the same time, they will encourage a more rapid and effective pastoral governance on the part of local authority, not least by facilitating its proximity to individuals and situations that demand it” (*Competentias quasdam decenere*). This kind of language and expression of the desire for subsidiarity is very much in keeping with the Second Vatican Council, to which Pope Francis has repeatedly returned and espoused.

The changes to the canons are to both the Codes of the Eastern churches as well as to the Latin church. Here, I will only refer to changes to the Latin Code – what most of us refer to simply as The Code of Canon Law.

First, regarding exlaustration, canon 686§1 has been changed, allowing the period of exlaustration to be extended up to 5 years in place of the previous 3 year limit. Prior to this change, for a religious to receive an indult of exlaustration beyond 3 years,

there had to be a petition to the Holy See. Now, it is seen to be within the ordinary competence of a supreme moderator. For us as Benedictines, the supreme moderator is the abbot/abbess/prioress – the one elected as the major superior of the monastery. However, please note that this part of canon 686 does not apply to nuns/moniales. Rather, Cor orans 177 and 178 dictate a 3 year total period of exlaustration for nuns/moniales.

Second, regarding an indult of departure (commonly referred to as dispensation from vows) for a temporary professed religious, canon 688§2 has been changed so that even superiors of diocesan institutes have full jurisdiction to grant an indult of departure to a temporary professed without the need to get the consent of the diocesan bishop. Until the February 2022 change, the law had permitted only the superiors of “pontifical right” institutes to permit temporary members of the community, those who had not yet professed lifelong religious vows, to leave the order before their temporary vows expired. The superiors of “diocesan right” institutes needed the diocesan bishop to confirm that decision.

The change gives the same authority on this front to “diocesan right” superiors as is enjoyed by “pontifical right” superiors: to allow temporary members of the order to leave before their vows expire, without confirmation from an outside authority. In both cases, the superior does need the consent of the “council” (www.pillaratholic.com/p/the-canon-laws-they-are-a-changin?s=r).

Third, regarding dismissal of members of religious institutes, canons 699§2 and 700 have been amended. Canon 699§2 now reads: “In the autonomous monasteries mentioned in can. 615, it belongs to the major superior, with the consent of his or her council, to decide on dismissal.” Previously for these monasteries, it was required that only the diocesan bishop could effect a dismissal. Now, it is left to the superior of the monastery together with her/his monastic council. It is a recognition of the authority of superiors over their own monastery. Again, for us as Benedictines, the major superior is the abbot/abbess/prioress – the one elected as the major superior of the monastery.

Canon 700 now reads: “A decree of dismissal issued in the case of a professed member takes effect from the time that it is communicated to the member concerned. To be valid, however, the decree must indicate the right which the dismissed possesses to make recourse to the competent authority within ten days from receiving notification . . .” This allows

(continued next page)

the superior of a monastery to dismiss a member for a grave reason, with the consent of the monastic council, without having to seek confirmation from a higher authority, whether the diocesan bishop or the Holy See. Nevertheless, it seems advisable, for those monasteries part of a monastic congregation, to give review of the abbot's/prioress' decision for dismissal to the president and council of the monastic congregation. In that way, should the dismissed member seek recourse, the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) will see that there were already two levels of governance finding dismissal appropriate.

Fourth, regarding the new law allowing brothers to be elected superiors in clerical institutes, the Holy Father, through a rescript of May 18, 2022, has given CICLSAL the jurisdiction, in individual cases and in its own discretion, to allow a non-priest member of a men's religious institute, to be elected as major superior. This is a change (derogation) to canon 588§2 which says that clerical institutes "are under the direction [governance] of clerics." Interestingly, canon 588 begins with §1 which states, "By its very nature, the state of consecrated life is neither clerical nor lay." Nevertheless, those institutes which the church recognizes as clerical (i.e., having ordained members) are clerical. This is a change for which many clerical institutes, including Benedictines, have been asking for years.

It is important to note that this rescript of the Holy Father doesn't change canon 588§2 itself. Rather, it is now allowed for CICLSAL to grant a confirmation, through a written license, for the election of a non-cleric as superior of a clerical institute which requests such for a non-cleric to serve as a major superior. It should be noted that practically all Benedictine men's monasteries are considered clerical. Therefore, for there to be an election of a brother as abbot, there must be a request for a confirmation and it must be granted by CICLSAL. This particular change to canon law does not seem to follow the Holy Father's purpose, expressed in his February 2022 motu proprio, of subsidiarity (deciding at lowest possible level). Instead of giving the discretion to the religious institute itself, that discretion is still reserved to the Vatican (CICLSAL).

The rescript provides for three separate cases: the supreme moderator of an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life can name a non-cleric as a superior for a local community with the consent of his council (at this level no confirmation from CICLSAL

is required, only the next two); likewise, the supreme moderator, acting with the consent of his council, can name a non-cleric as a major superior after having received written permission from the Congregation; and a non-cleric can be elected as a supreme moderator or a major superior, in accordance with the law providing for such cases, but such an election must be confirmed in writing by the Congregation (www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-05/pope-allows-non-clerics-to-be-major-superiors-in-certain-cases.html).

If you have a question or idea for a future column, feel free to contact Sister Lynn.

Lynn McKenzie, OSB, JCL
Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, Alabama
lynnmckenzieosb@gmail.com

ATTENTION MONASTIC ARTISTS

The Visual Arts Section of the ABA invites Benedictine artists to submit digital images of their artwork for the Virtual ABA Convention. Artists may submit one to four digital images.

The digital gallery will be available on the ABA website, Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.

Criteria for submission:

- Digital Media in JPEG format of artwork in any medium (fiber, ceramic, woodworking, stain glass, photography, etc.)
- Each submission must be clearly labeled with artist's name
- Title (optional)
- Medium
- Name of artist's community and its location

Submissions for the digital gallery need to be in JPEG format. Please email files to: greg.evans.oblsb@icloud.com by June 21, 2022. Please contact Gregory Evans with any questions or concerns: Phone (571) 225-7745, Email: greg.evans.oblsb@icloud.com.

Being an Ordinary Benedictine

Oblate Pat Pickett, who has been participating in the Being Benedictine conversations, has become a staff writer for AMN, contributing various pieces that introduce aspects of the Benedictine world. In this issue, she shares both her own story and that of another oblate she has met through the recent Being Benedictine conversations.

Continuing connections from the Being Benedictine conference bring discovery and new partnerships which are beginning to enrich the lives of many people. One such story begins with Michelle Johnson Howell, oblate of the sisters at the ecumenical community at Mount Tabor, Kentucky.

“Motherhood provided me vision for what’s possible, and as this vision became more of a reality we found ourselves facing opposition from present day power arrangements that I believed to be in direct opposition to the desires of God. It was over the next few years that I would find myself questioning everything I had ever known to be true; politics, religion, hunger, womanhood, food, race, and inequitable systems in general would be wrestled with one by one. It was a time of healing old wounds.

“After a time of darkness, I was mysteriously called to the monastery in Kentucky. It was there that the vision that had been given to me so many years before was restored and I was encouraged to both settle in at home with my own Benedictine ‘daily rule’ of prayer and work while engaging my community with justice. The strength I gained prepared me for the deliverance of new possibility in my community work.”

With creativity and determination, Michelle and her husband, Nathan, have been defying the odds and breaking norms since 2002. They have done something unheard of in today’s world. They gave up promising careers in agriculture and went right to the land. “Need More Acres” farm was born. They describe the first two acres as part farm, part community hub, and all heart. At the root of their dream was to feed people well with good food and hospitality.

Today, Need More Acres grows fruits, vegetables, beef, and chickens on 20 acres in Scottsville, Kentucky. They share knowledge of growing food from “seed to plate” so others may do the same. The whole family, which includes five children, is involved

in this endeavor. This model of social justice is the highlight of conferences throughout the state as they share what they have learned. All this is buttressed with the charisms and values they share with Benedict and the Rule.

Lay people who embrace the way of Benedict long for a greater connection with Benedictine monasteries as a way of sharing and prayer connection. This has happened in some places, but in many other places, oblates and monastics run parallel paths.

Michelle’s question, as well as that of many others is: “How can the monasteries of today meet lay people like me, where we are, and invite us into the holy work of a life of prayer and community?”

When I was a young mother, it didn’t even occur to me that the monasteries could be helpful in creating a Benedictine family. I tried, in my own way to model Benedictine values.

My children are grown, and I always wonder if I did enough. Was being a Benedictine oblate enough? Reading the rule, praying psalms, being accountable for my actions – did this transfer to my children?

Young people are demanding more. Younger families want a real connection. Recently, in a conversation with one of my sons (Liam, St. John’s University, 1992), he matter-of-factly relayed an experience which surprised me. A classmate had died a few weeks before. Liam decided to gather his class together and, after notifying everyone, Liam and a couple of friends created an online memorial service. Now, these kids (young men) hadn’t been together in years, but they all participated in a Zoom memorial service created by a couple of classmates, none of whom was a priest, minister or even an oblate. I registered astonishment when I replied. To my remark, Liam said, “Mom, that’s what Benedictines do – come together in community.”

Certainly, I cannot claim credit for Liam being Benedictine. He had four years at St. John’s, where being Benedictine was as real as breathing. A monk even lived in his dorm with them. Benedict made it so easy to be a Christian. Pray often and briefly, be accountable for your actions, love God, your neighbor, yourself and creation. Benedictine values often are like water seeking its own level in communities throughout this world. We just have to capture this phenomenon and help it work.

Michelle, with her husband Nathan, are reaching many persons who never heard of St. Benedict with their work of peace and justice on their farm. What Michelle and Nathan need now is connection and support of other young families trying, in their own way, to live the Rule of Benedict. They need monastics to take their desire to live Benedictine charisms seriously.

Recently, at a gathering of interested persons connecting with Being Benedictine, groups began to form which, hopefully, will energize and catapult this spark of creative Benedictine spirit well beyond the 21st century. Perhaps one of the groups might be formed which speaks to young parents about being Benedictine right in their own homes, neighborhoods, cities.

In my interviews with Michelle, I realized that my writing her story is not nearly as effective as it is in her own words. Here is her blog, which will give you details of her fascinating and profound, yet totally within the realm of ordinary, story to excite and challenge: www.michellejohnsonhowell.com. The website for Need More Acres Farm is: <https://needmoreacres.com>.

Michelle also wrote an article for *Spirit & Life* magazine called "Monastic Motherhood": <https://benedictinesisters.org/images/spiritandlife/S&L%20Mar-April%202021.pdf#page=9>

I leave you with another of Michelle's questions which is also mine: "Could it be that lay people, living holy lives of prayer and work, are what the monasteries of today need most right now?"

Pat Pickett, Oblate
St. Benedict's Monastery
St. Joseph, Minnesota

New Members Since Last Newsletter

The following have become ABA members since the February 2022 newsletter:

Stephen Bruns - Kansas City, Missouri
Romney Ruder - Maize, Kansas
Peter M. Wheeler - Elkbridge, Maryland
Barbara Wodynski - Cheney, Washington
Debbie McCoy - McCall, Idaho
Sister Elizabeth Wagner, OSB - Windsor, Maine

COMING EVENTS

* * * * *

I would like to inform you that it has been decided that the "5th World Congress of Benedictine Oblates" will be held at the Badia Primaziale Sant'Anselmo, in Rome, from 9 to 16 September 2023.

We count on your usual collaboration for the success of this important event, which we are working on together with the International Team of Benedictine Oblates.

Sincerely in Christ,
Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B.

* * * * *

This year's North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) convention will be hosted at St. Meinrad's Archabbey in Indiana, August 4-9, with the theme "Weaving St. Benedict's Way of Life into the Future." The speakers are Fr. Thomas Gricoski, OSB, of St. Meinrad Archabbey, Sister Judith Sutera, OSB, of Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, and Sister Anita Louise Lowe of Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana. This gathering is for directors of oblates and/or an oblate designated by them to attend. Registration and details are on the NAABOD website: www.naabod.org.

* * * * *

The International Thomas Merton Society will hold its 18th General Meeting, "Sophia Comes Forth, Reaching," June 22-25, 2023, at St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana. We invite proposals for presentations related to the conference theme on topics such as (but not limited to): contemplation and mysticism; the divine feminine and feminine images of God; intersectional issues of justice and gender; women's leadership in social change; and Merton's relationship to and/or work on women writers, as well as other related themes. The Call for Papers, which are due October 15, 2022 is at: <http://merton.org/2023>.

Report from Kalamazoo

The American Benedictine Academy sponsored a session of four papers at the (online) 57th International Congress on Medieval Studies, May 9-14, 2022. The subject of the session was “How Did Medieval Benedictines Respond to Crises?”

Stephanie Skenyon (Mississippi University for Women) spoke on “Inverting the Past, Confronting the Present: Narrative Contrasts in Benedictine ‘House History’ Chronicles.” Benedictine “house histories” of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries used various literary techniques, such as narrative contrast, to give meaning to the present.

Marc Philip Saurette (Carleton University) presented “Commemorating the Tumultuous Twelfth Century at Cluny.” Cluny had many crises during the twelfth century, not the least of which was the abbacy of Pontius between 1109 and 1122. In the earliest accounts, intended to be read only by Cluniac monks, Pontius is vilified. When Pontius is written about for an audience outside of Cluny, however, he is made anodyne and, by the thirteenth century, even saintly. Over the centuries, Cluniac authors deliberately attempted to cover up negative mentions of Pontius until Cluny also forgot this past.

Hugh Bernard Feiss, OSB (Monastery of the Ascension) had as his topic “Weaving a Web of Resiliency at Petershausen, 983-1175.” We know of Petershausen’s history through a chronicle begun retrospectively about 1134 and continued until about 1170. Petershausen was an *Eigenkloster*, founded across the Rhine from the city and cathedral of Constance by Bishop Gebhard II. The familia of the monastery included monks, nuns, brothers, retirees, donate/ae, donors, volunteers, those who asked to be buried there or for prayers, and the saints whose relics the monastery held. The monastery operated a hostel for the needy. These factors enabled the community to survive a forced reform, which caused the abbot and many monks to leave, and a devastating fire.

The presentation of Maureen M. O’Brien (St. Cloud State University) was “Silencing Demons and Saving Neighbors: How the Miracle Stories in the Vita of Robert of La Chaise-Dieu Can Help Us Better Understand His Community’s Survival.” According to his hagiographer, Marbod of Rennes, as a child, a canon at Brioude, and a hermit and monastic founder in the tumultuous context of the eleventh-century Auvergne, Robert of La Chaise-Dieu was very concerned to be united to God and to help

the poor. He founded La Chaise-Dieu in an area of marginalized people and abandoned parish churches, many of which he restored, with the desire to dedicate himself to God alone. To live such a life would have meant turning away from those in need, which he could not abide. He was extremely generous to the people among whom his monastery was situated, and by miracles, teaching, and charity he nurtured them and bonded with them, which embedded him and his community in their lives and hearts.

The American Benedictine Academy is an annual sponsor of a session at the congress and intends to submit a request for the 2023 meeting with the theme “Benedictine Moderation: the Shifting Balance of Work, Prayer and Reading.” Next year’s congress will be a hybrid event and will be held May 11 to May 13. Anyone with an interest in submitting a paper on this topic may contact me at hughfeiss@gmail.com.

Hugh Feiss, OSB
Jerome, Idaho



Father Augustine Curley, OSB, has been elected abbot of Newark Abbey (Newark, New Jersey).

Several communities have chosen to re-elect their current leadership. They are:

- Prioress Elizabeth Brown - St. Lucy’s, Glendora, California
- Prioress Catherine Godfrey - St. Gertrude’s, Newark, Delaware
- Prioress Aileen Bankemper - St. Walburg, Covington, Kentucky
- Father Jonathan Licari, OSB, of St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, has been named administrator of St. Mary’s Abbey, Morristown, New Jersey.

* * * * *

After a pandemic-imposed hiatus, an “Under 55” meeting – a gathering of Benedictine sisters from across the country who have not reached the age of 56 – took place April 1-3 at Our Lady of Grace in Beech Grove, Indiana. The participants heard presentations on their role in shaping the future of monastic life from the presidents of their federations/congregations and from Sister Judith Sutera, OSB, of Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, Kansas. Dialogue with each other grew from the theme, as the younger Benedictines build their bonds and explore the challenges and gifts of this period in history.

Updates from Ukraine

Region 7 of CIB, the worldwide confederation of Benedictine women, consists of monasteries in Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania. A report from their representative states that donations are being provided directly to Benedictine communities in Ukraine, support communities in Poland taking in refugees (there are about 3 million of them in Poland), and those that organize transports of food, medicines and other necessities to Ukraine (mainly to the Benedictine communities, which take care of their further distribution).

She says, “We also receive offers to provide shelter for communities of sisters who would like to take refuge from the war. We are very grateful for them and appreciate this gesture of solidarity, but no sister wants to leave Ukraine. The communities that initially evacuated from the war zones to the west of the country are returning to their convents as soon as it becomes possible. The only sisters who came to Poland were those who accompanied evacuated children from orphanages and were their legal guardians.”

In addition to the report on Zhytomyr and Lviv (Ukraine), there is news of the Missionary Sisters of St. Benedict (Ukraine and Poland), who have 11 houses in Ukraine. Their 21 houses in Poland, in agreement with city authorities, welcomed people fleeing the war. Humanitarian aid shipments to Ukraine reach the most needy through proven corridors.

An excerpt from a message from Mother General Anuncjata Zdunek, OSB Sam., of the Benedictine Samaritan Sisters of the Cross of Christ (Poland) reads, “We have received Refugees from Ukraine in three houses: Niegowo, Karwow (Single Mother's Home) and in Pruszkow (Social Assistance Home). We helped about 40 people (mothers with children, there are also elderly and disabled people). Some of them managed to find a job, also in our institutions. We help them with current issues related to their stay in Poland, obtaining benefits due to them

from the Polish State, providing schooling for their children. A big challenge [is] especially those who are ill: condition after kidney transplantation, juvenile diabetes, heart disease and other current illnesses, which involves seeking specialists or transport to doctors or hospitals. The youngest is a 5-month-old boy whose mother is intellectually disabled. “Thank you for your support on behalf of our Guests in need.”

The Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary (Poland), with its three monasteries of nuns with houses for guests, accepted refugees from Ukraine. “Our lives have changed radically due to the outbreak of war,” says Sister Barbara Dendor, OSB, the prioress of the monastery in Jarosław, “but it is in this situation that we can realize the commandment of love. Among those fleeing are mainly mothers with children. Some of them spent only a few days in Jarosław before continuing their journey, others remain near the border, hoping to return home quickly after the war is over. There is also a kindergarten at the monastery which accepts Ukrainian children.”

“We do not treat them as refugees but guests who have found a shelter with us, a safe place where they can feel good,” adds Mother Stefania Polkowska, OSB, the abbess of Staniątki. “We know each other by name. With every day we feel more and more like one big family. Of course, by putting the guest houses at the disposal of the refugees, the sisters lost their source of income and they are very grateful for all the support.”

The Benedictine Nuns of Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in Warsaw have joined the Caritas Poland campaign “Parcel for Ukraine” with basic supplies for a family of several people for a week. Sisters want to prepare at least 100 such packages.

All of the communities have expressed their deepest gratitude for all the assistance they have received. Donations can be made through AIM-USA: <https://aim-usa.org>.

Did You Know...

The Monastic Researchers section of ABA has a regular newsletter about current publications and research by members. Back issues are available on the ABA's website under the “Publications” tab.



Book Review

Like A Mustard Seed: A History of the First Benedictine Women's Monastery in North America
By Sister Ephrem Hollermann, OSB (Federation of St. Scholastica, 2022), 554 pp.

Benedictine historian Sister Ephrem Hollermann is an able historian whose specialty is the history of Benedictine women. Thus, she was the ideal choice to chronicle the life of St. Joseph's Monastery in St. Marys, Pennsylvania. The community was founded from the venerable abbey of St. Walburga in Eichstaat, Bavaria, in 1852, and closed in 2014, after being the source of a majority of the Benedictine women's monasteries in this country.

The author begins with the German origins of both the monastery and the town of St. Marys, founded as a refuge for German families fleeing poverty and prejudice in the cities. The poverty followed them there, but they were blessed with sisters who would care and pray for them for generations. The book follows their story as they opened schools and health care facilities, grew in numbers and sent members out on missions that would become independent monasteries, growing and expanding across the nation from coast to coast.

While early records are sparse, and most have appeared in other historical works, this is the first time that much of this community's history has been narrated. As the reader follows them through the decades, one sees a story much like that of so many other communities: founding, struggling, growing, experiencing effects from Church and national events. Because so many more materials have been available in the recent past, Sister Ephrem is meticulous in chronicling the many meetings and studies that led to the ultimate decision to bring this monastery to its completion.

Commissioned to do this study by the Federation of St. Scholastica, Sister Ephrem has discharged her duty with great skill and reverence. It is over 500 pages long, with many photos illustrating each chapter and with appendices listing the sisters and ministries of the community. Independently published, the book is available from the online bookstore Lulu for \$18 at this address: <https://www.lulu.com/en/us/shop/ephrem-rita-hollermann/like-a-mustard-seed/paperback/product-wnj82d.html?page=1&pageSize=4>.

In early March, the Benedictine Sisters of Immaculate Conception Abbey evacuated from Zhytomyr to their monastery in Lviv. There, the nuns put practically the entire monastery building at the disposal of the refugees. At first their guests stayed only for a short time before continuing their journey westward to Poland; now, only those who do not want to leave Ukraine stay there - about 90 people. The monastery also acts as a food distribution center for food and supplies, since bombing near Lviv blocked humanitarian aid coming into their area.

Several weeks ago, seven nuns returned to Zhytomyr. Fortunately, the monastery survived – and they were greeted with a rainbow. The rest of the community remains in Lviv, as they continue to serve the refugees.

Mother Klara and the sisters sent this message of gratitude for your prayers and financial support:

“Thank you for your solidarity with our suffering people and assisting us to bring God's loving presence in the most destitute place on earth: people whose homes and lives were attacked and destroyed. Strangers, travelers and outcasts have literally become our sisters and brothers, living across the hall of our cells and under the gaze of the God who created us. Without your financial support, this could not continue. We are grateful to God and for you and the benefactors who share this ministry of presence and mercy. May the Lord Himself be your eternal reward for your kindness and open hearts! It is difficult for us to express our gratitude, but you can be sure that the prayers and blessings of the poor whom you have helped will accompany you on your life's journey.”

Mother Klara the Benedictine Sisters of Zhytomyr and Lviv.

Sister Ann Hoffman, OSB
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NOMINEES FOR ABA BOARD

An important part of the ABA convention's business meeting is the election of ABA members to serve on the organization's board of directors. This July, a new vice-president (who becomes president in two years) and two board members will be elected at the convention. Duties can be found in the by-laws, posted on the website: <https://americanbenedictine.org/wp-content/uploads/Constitution-and-By-laws.pdf>.

Information about the candidates is provided in the June *AMN* in advance of the convention for the members' deliberation. Please take time to give this serious right of membership your attention and prayer.

Nominees for Vice-President

The vice president serves for a two year term, after which he or she succeeds to the presidency for the following two years.

Sister Edith Bogue: I am a sociologist, spiritual director, and social worker by training and a Benedictine for 23 years. I have served as a college professor, oblate and vocation director, retreat leader and spiritual director. I am in the Transfer Program at Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama, where I serve as the associate director of the retreat center.



A long-time ABA member, I have presented at the 2006 convention, conducted the pandemic member survey and joined the Board in 2020.

I am enthusiastic about the ABA's potential role in connecting the various parts of the Benedictine world: monastics, scholars, oblates, contemplatives, and other interested individuals and groups. As a small organization with a volunteer board, ABA's challenge is to refresh its identity and activities while remaining true to its mission. We can meet this challenge through conversation with members (and non-members), collaboration with other organizations and monasteries, growth in membership and member participation, and the possible redesign of long-standing events for our new, virtually-oriented lifestyles. I am eager to work toward making this a reality.



Dr. Romney Ruder: I am an oblate at St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas, and President of Lifeline Global Ministries, working with the incarcerated and their families around the globe. Prior to taking on this role, my family and I were missionaries for World Impact for almost a decade, where I served as Senior Vice President and COO. I am also on the faculty of Newman University, and have been a large part of the Prison oblate program. I also share my Benedictine values and practices as a weekly teacher at Hutchinson Correctional. I am ordained as a Pastor and Chaplain and am a Fellow with the C.S. Lewis Institute.

Although new to the ABA, my vision would be to continue to drive membership and utilize advancements in communication technology.

Sister Jeana Visel: I'm a Sister of St. Benedict from Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana. Presently I live and work at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology, serving as Dean of School of Theology Programs and Director of the Graduate Theology Program. I teach courses on iconography and spirituality, and occasionally assist with chant programs. I have been serving on the ABA board for several years, and also am on the editorial board of the *American Benedictine Review*. I hope to continue to help the ABA cultivate scholarship among those involved with monastic studies, providing a worthwhile meeting point for those involved in this kind of research and writing.



Nominees for Board

Current board member Sister Colleen Maura McGrane will complete her term and is not eligible for re-election. Board members Tom Piazza and Sister Jeana Visel remain on the board for another 2 years. Sister Edith Bogue was elected to a 2-year term in 2020 to complete the board term of Gregory Evans, who was elected vice president at that meeting, and can now be re-elected if she is not elected as vice president. If Sister Jeana is elected vice president, a third board member will need to be elected to finish her board term.

Sister Edith Bogue: (see previous page)

Sister Virginia Jung: I entered St. Scholastica Monastery in Chicago in August of 2002. At the time, I was teaching Spanish in our high school. I currently am a pastoral counselor in private practice and the archivist for my community.



I joined the American Benedictine Academy in 2016 and have been able to participate in 3 conventions: 2 in person and 1 online. Here in Chicago, I organized a socially distant social during the 2020 online ABA convention. The Archivists Section of ABA was welcoming and supportive when I began as community archivist, and in appreciation, I have convened that section as well as the Librarians Section for several years. We even held a special section meeting by Zoom in the summer of 2021. I value the enthusiasm and camaraderie of ABA, as well as our commitment to scholarship and craftsmanship. It is a forum to share our work and our values as Benedictines and to further the study of diverse aspects of Benedictine life. It also seems like a space where vowed members and oblates work together in harmony for shared values. I would like to see ABA carry its mission forward and possibly expand to include other workers that St. Benedict recognizes in the Rule, such as liturgists, musicians, or infirmarians as we study and reflect on the past, present, and future of our monastic charism.



Oblate Judith Valente:

Since leaving my position at a National Public Radio station in Illinois, I have dedicated myself to writing books and articles and guiding retreats ...

One of my current duties is to serve as co-chair of the “Being Benedictine in the 21st Century” effort, to reflect on how we can best carry our Benedictine values into a world desperately in need of those values. I am also co-chair of one of the working groups, discerning the current needs of oblates.

As a board member, I would see one of my roles being serving as a liaison between the ABA and this network, helping to strengthen an already fruitful association, and helping to further the ABA’s mission

to “cultivate, support and transmit the Benedictine heritage within contemporary culture.”

As communications director for the upcoming 2023 International Oblate Congress in Rome, I would hope to spread the word about the ABA to oblates from across the U.S., as well as those in English-speaking foreign countries who would also be interested in the work of the ABA.

I served on the board from 2014 to 2020 and believe this is an especially exciting time in the history of the ABA. Since 2013, it has been my honor to be an oblate of Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas. As a result of my writings, I have had the privilege of building relationships with monastic communities and oblate groups across the U.S. It would be a goal of mine to act as an ambassador for the ABA as I continue those relationships.

The Terrence G. Kardong MONASTIC STUDIES GRANT

ABA members are invited to apply for Monastic Studies Grants to support projects that “cultivate, support and transmit the Benedictine heritage within contemporary culture.” Applications will be selected on the basis of quality of the proposal (originality, feasibility, clarity of purpose), potential benefit for monastics, and relevance to the purposes of the Academy. More details are on the ABA website.

To apply for a grant please supply:

- Name, address, phone number, e-mail
- Religious or academic affiliation (if any)
- A brief description of the proposed project
- The goal(s) of the proposed project
- An itemized budget which includes:

- total cost of project
- sources of funding other than the ABA
- sum requested from the ABA

Send applications to:

Greg Peters
THI, Biola University
13800 Biola Avenue
La Mirada, CA 90639

or submit by email as a Word document to:
greg.peters@biola.edu

American Benedictine Academy

Membership Form



Type of Membership:

Individual/1 Yr (\$35) _____ Individual/2 Yrs (\$50) _____ Student/1 Yr (\$15) _____

New _____ Renewal _____

Payment: Check _____ Paypal _____

Date _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Country (if not USA) _____

Work Phone _____ Cell _____

Email _____

Religious Community/Oblate Affiliation/Academic/Other

Areas of Interest You Wish to Share with the Academy

Please check if you wish to participate in one or more ABA Sections:

Monastic Research _____ Visual Arts _____ Archives _____ Library _____

Send form to: Julie A. Ferraro - ABA
Mount St. Scholastica
801 South 8th Street
Atchison, KS 66002
Email: ABAcadSec@gmail.com

ABA Use Only

Date Rec'd	Amount	Payment	Year