



Sisters of Benedict

NEWSLETTER

Winter 1998, Vol. 9: Issue 3

The freshness of a first snow excites us.
It seems to blanket all our yesterdays.
Uncertain mystery is hidden in its
purity.

But the fences or barriers of our making
often cause unfulfilled expectations.
It doesn't really have to be that way,
does it?

May the promise of Christmas help us
reach beyond ourselves, today and
tomorrow.

Robert Lawton Jones

The Promise of Christmas: a Celebration of Hope copyright 1996

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Christmas Greetings
Sisters of Benedict
Red Plains Monastery

Message from the Prioress, Sister Marie Ballmann, OSB

We've celebrated the glories of a beautiful autumn and our hearts swell with praise and thanksgiving for the many ways God has blessed us this past year.

The natural beauty that surrounds our monastery is a multilayered gift that bestows a variety of delights each season. From the dogwood blossoms in early spring to the apples and pears that grace our table in late fall and are frozen for winter use, to the golden cottonwoods in November, to the majestic blue heron that often swoops over our small lake and to the shy deer who come into our yard when all is quiet--we catch our breath and thank the God of all creation for these blessed moments.

After an extremely dry summer, most of the lake bed was exposed and grass and weeds began to grow where water should have been. This gave us the time we needed to attend to some serious clean up along the banks. A new concrete culvert replaces the old corrugated tin one, and the roadway across it was elevated.



On October 4th, our first major rain in months again covered the lake bed. Several more heavy rains brought the water close to its normal level. At the end of November, Jason Thompson completed his Eagle Scout project--a bridge built over the spillway behind the lake

And now, suddenly, it is Advent. As we prepare for winter, we can pause to reflect on how our Old Testament ancestors longed so passionately for the Savior of the World

to heal the disharmony of their lives. Our world today still struggles to accept Jesus' compassionate way of life. When we hear those familiar stories in our liturgies--the longing, the desire for God's reign in our lives and in the world--let us

renew our commitment to take the steps we can to make it happen.

When we pray, we can also take time to listen to what God is speaking to our hearts, how God is asking us to incarnate the Son of God in our lives, in our family, in our workplace, in our faith community:

May each of us be gifted with a tender heart this Christmas and surrender to God's call to bring Peace on our beautiful Earth.



We have been witnessing the construction of the fourth house in our Monastery cluster. It is moving along rapidly and will be completed sometime after the first of the year.

Furnishing the home will be yet another endeavor! If you have serviceable items to donate to help us, please contact Sister Marie Ballmann at 373-4569.

Things we need:

- 5 bed frames
- 5 chests of drawers
- 5 bedroom chairs
- 5 bedside stands
- 5 lamps
- Living room couch

- 2 occasional chairs
- 2 end tables
- 2 lamps
- Small dining room table and chairs
- 3 breakfast barstools

Library needs:

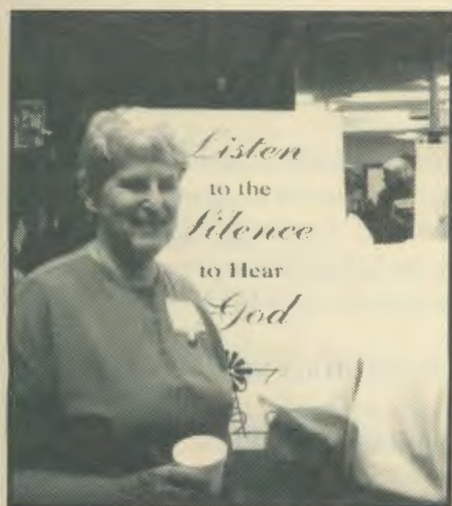
- Computer, printer, desk & chair

We have limited storage space until the home is completed, but will be happy to work with you.

.....Around & About the Monastery.....

Cecilia Lynne Mosomane, a Sister of Calvary from Botswana, Africa, is a student at Oklahoma City University. One of her professors, Abigail Keegan, a former member of our community, introduced Cecilia to us. She hopes to spend most of her Christmas break here.

Co-members of the community gathered on the Saturday following Thanksgiving for their annual retreat. Their focus was on knowing oneself in order to help with one's own healing. Audio tapes by Caroline Myss, a medical intuitor, provided the impetus for reflective sharing.



Sister Benedicta Boland led a workshop, "The Spirituality of Silence: Prayer of the Heart" during WOMEN'S BOLD JOURNEYS conference at St. Luke's Methodist Church, Oklahoma City, in October. Wilma Mankiller was keynote speaker for the day-long conference, designed as "a fair to lift up women's perspectives."

Pictured is Sister Jan Futrell at the information booth which the community shared with Joanne Fergie of Mercy Center; Mary Moloney, S.P. of Life Journeys, and Bob Gardenhire of Hearthpaths.

Eagle Scout Jason Thompson, second from left, stands with his father, Frank, far left and fellow Scouts, Daniel Smith and Patrick Lawrence on the nearly completed bridge over the spillway across our lake. Other helpers on the project not pictured are Anthony Palazzola and Sean Corbett. The Scouts are members of Troop 120 of Christ the King Parish.



One fine autumn day, Angelica Nizza, a co-member of the community, was walking with Sister Miriam. They noticed a "fat, gorgeous, colorful" worm in the garden on the parsley bush. Remembering the community's curiosity and delight watching a butterfly's emergence several years ago, they placed the worm inside a glass jar and began feeding it a diet of parsley leaves. Fairly soon, the worm converted itself to a chrysalis. Some twelve days later, to the utter amazement of all, Ms. Swallowtail Butterfly emerged from her protective shell and stretched her splendid wet wings to meet the new world. Tom Temple, our construction contractor, snapped this photo of Ms. Butterfly meeting her first chrysanthemum!

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"Following the Star to Bethlehem" was the title of several one-day Advent Retreats offered on our Monastery grounds. Sister Melissa Letts designed and facilitated the opportunity for participants to be in touch with the journey at the beginning of the Church's liturgical year.



Sister Miriam Schnoebelen attended the November meeting of the Council for the Federation of St. Scholastica held at Sacred Heart Monastery in Lisle, Illinois. Miriam was elected by our community to serve a four year term as member of the Council.

Our Community Sponsors Nicole Tabor in Chiapas, Mexico

During the past summer, the Sisters of Benedict elected to sponsor an Oklahoman to Chiapas, Mexico, to participate in the Mexico Solidarity Network's 86 member delegation. Nichole Tabor, a Peace House volunteer, traveled in July to Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico, to learn about the struggle of the indigenous people for justice and democracy.

The delegation included ten Native Americans from the U.S. and Canada. Representatives from the religious community included a Catholic priest and two Sisters of St. Francis. Four Canadian delegates came from Montreal and British Columbia; professors from Northwestern University, Princeton University and University of Witwaterstrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, were included. In addition, Doctors for Global Health from Syracuse, New York, and Berkeley, California, were members of the delegation. Twenty-four states were represented.

Delegates divided into ten groups to visit thirty-four communities of fourteen Municipios (the rough equivalent of counties) of Chiapas, widely considered the poorest state in Mexico. Eight of ten indigenous families do not have electricity and more than 90% do not have running water. The illiteracy rate in Chiapas is three times higher than the rest of Mexico for children under age fifteen. Most of the families are subsistence farmers; principal crops are corn and beans, with coffee the major cash crop. The drought has had a terrible effect on the people. Bean crops did not produce and the corn did not mature. Predicted famine came in August and September.

The citizens of Chiapas are besieged by terror directed at them by the military and paramilitary groups deployed by the government. The people live in fear of losing their food, land and lives. Last December, forty-five men, women and children were massacred at Acteal while praying for peace at a temple. No place is truly safe.

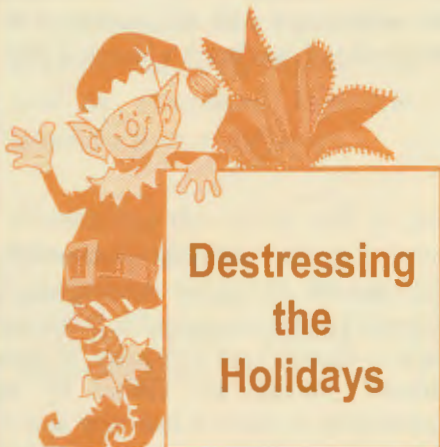
Nicole primarily became a "listener" of the people's stories during her visit to two communities, Roberto Barrios and Agua Blanca. At Roberto Barrios she reported that the men never go anywhere alone. They travel in groups to work, but always leave in fear that people will be taken off. One of their men was assassinated, and, despite the testimony of eye witnesses, all five arrested for the crime were released. Later the house belonging to the father of the man murdered was burned in retaliation for his public protest of the freeing of the men. The fire killed a two-year-old child and two other children received third degree burns.

At Agua Blanca, Nicole heard the stories of how struggles over land wreak havoc on the people. People are kicked off land by officials for failure to pay electric bills. Their houses are taken apart; they are continually harassed by officials. In some instances crops are burned by the paramilitary. The indigenous are treated and killed like animals.

Observers are the only voice that the indigenous people have. The government offers the indigenous no protection, and the media is biased toward the government. The people only want to be free and recognized in society.

Nicole reports "as citizens of the free world, we must work for the liberation of those oppressed. Our country that works so hard to fight terrorism indirectly funds terrorism in Mexico. Please protest military aid to Mexico and the functioning of the School of Americas in Georgia, where several soldiers arrested for the massacre in Acteal were trained."

What to do: The Mexico Solidarity Network is collecting funds to ease the suffering of the famine. Checks may be made payable to Mexico Solidarity Network and mailed to Joy Mennonite Church, 504 NE 16th Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73104. The checks will be forwarded to the Mexico Solidarity Network.



The holiday season is upon us, and if you are like many people, you may find it a bit stressful. The pressure is on to find the perfect gift, prepare the perfect meal, have the house perfectly decorated, be the perfect parent, spouse or child. The Oklahoma Psychological and Educational Center offers the following hints and tips for dealing with the stressful holiday season:

1. Listen to yourself to see if you notice signs of tension, worry or anxiety (e.g. tightness of shoulders, frown, furrowed brow.)
2. Smile outwardly with your mouth and

eyes and smile inwardly with a sense of amusement.

3. Inhale an easy, natural breath into your lower abdomen.

4. Pause and think to yourself, "Alert mind, calm body."

5. Exhale, letting your jaw, tongue and shoulders go loose; feel a wave of limpness, heaviness and warmth go down to your toes.

6. Repeat the above exercises until you feel more comfortable. Congratulate yourself for letting go of useless tension and replacing it with an attitude of health.

The Sisters of Red Plains Monastery are thankful to you, our faithful benefactors, who have supported us throughout the year with generous gifts, prayers and presence with us. We wish to honor and publicly thank the many individuals, companies, organizations who have shared so much with us.

We particularly thank the volunteers who help us by sharing their personal time and countless hours. It is our privilege to honor the memory of and the living presence of those individuals you have remembered through your gifts. Our donors listed below include those who have contributed from November 1, 1997 to November 1, 1998. Thank you, thank you.

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