



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 Benedictine monasteries of North America and members of the American Benedictine Academy.

A Journalist's View: Interview with Judy Valente

Over the past years, this newsletter has sometimes contained interviews with persons from outside the monastery whose experience with monastic communities has given them significant insights to share. The latest installment is an interview with Judith Valente, journalist, poet and retreat leader. She works currently for "Religion & Ethics Newsweekly" on national PBS-TV, a religion news program anchored by Bob Abernethy and seen on 300 PBS stations throughout the country. She is also a frequent contributor to Chicago Public Radio and WGLT Radio in central Illinois. She worked previously as a staff writer for *The Washington Post* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

She has reported two stories for national PBS from the Abbey of Gethsemani: one in 2008 on the enduring legacy of Thomas Merton and a 2012 profile of Brother Paul Quenon, a monk of the abbey who has written four books of poetry. She is co-editor with Brother Paul of *The Art of Pausing: Meditations for the Overworked and Overwhelmed* (ACTA Publications, Chicago), a collection of haiku, photographs and brief reflections on the contemplative life.

A segment she reported on Mount St. Scholastica Monastery in Atchison, Kansas, appeared on national PBS-TV's "Religion & Ethics Newsweekly" in 2009. In 2010, she was interviewed on WTTW-TV Chicago about her frequent visits to Mount St. Scholastica. She also wrote about those experiences in an article entitled "Lessons from a Benedictine Monastery," which appeared as an "On Religion" column in *USA Today* in April 2012. In a July 2012 article in *The Kansas City Star* entitled "A Good Death," she related the moving story of witnessing the dying process, death and burial of a sister. She recently completed a book on her experiences as a regular visitor to Mount St. Scholastica called *Atchison Blue: A Search for Silence, a Spiritual Home and a Living Faith* (Sorin Books, South Bend). Another "Religion & Ethics Newsweekly" piece in September 2010 featured Abbot Barnabas Senecal of St. Benedict's Abbey in Atchison and his photography.

You've been covering monastic communities for quite a few years now. How did you initially become interested in this?

I really knew very little about monastic life and hardly thought about it. Then my first book, *Twenty Poems to Nourish Your Soul* was published. The book is an anthology of poems and reflections on finding the sacred in the everyday. I began receiving requests from various retreat centers across the country to give workshops/retreats on the connection between poetry and the inner life. One of the first centers

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President's Message

I think it may have been sometime in 1999, while I was working in the graduate program in liturgy at the Catholic University of America, that Sister Mary Collins of Mount St. Scholastica Monastery first suggested that I might want to attend a meeting of the American Benedictine Academy. Since 1995 I had been studying under Mary's direction and in that time she had come to know me and something about the Community of Jesus where I live. I believe she thought ABA would be both a good experience for me personally and perhaps a helpful relationship for our community. She was correct on both counts.

My first convention was in August 2000 at St. Meinrad Archabbey, on "The Good News of Monastic Life: Reading the Signs of the Times." I met Brother Richard Oliver who was leading the pre-convention workshop on website design for monasteries. I remember his describing the monastery website as a "door" into the community, and raising questions about how the Benedictine value of hospitality might apply to that kind of door (I know there was much, much more, Richard, but that part stuck with me). I went home and shared what I could with the tech people in my own community (being quite un-tech savvy myself), who were working on our website. Twelve years later, ABA's own website has been newly designed by members of the Community of Jesus who work for Paraclete Press. Now there's a circle for you.

Standing in line for one of the meals at the convention, Father Joel Ripinger introduced himself to me and struck up a conversation. I like to think that we hit it off well (Joel pretty much hits it off well with everyone), because those minutes began a relationship that has continued since. Joel was the one who first suggested that Damasus Winzen, OSB might be a suitable topic for my dissertation, which in turn got me to Mount Saviour Monastery and connected me with dozens of other Benedictines in the process. Joel visited and spoke to our community a couple of years ago, and people are still asking me when he will come back.

Two of the keynote speakers at the 2000 convention were Sister Ephrem Hollerman of St. Benedict's Monastery and Abbot Matthew Leavy of St. Anselm's. Ephrem and I eventually served on the ABA board together and Abbot Matthew, who also spoke to our community the following year, graciously agreed to read and comment on the new Rule of Life we were creating for our community (as did Mary Collins). ABA also put me in touch with Father Dan Ward who was equally generous with his time and immensely helpful in fine-tuning our rule.

New members to the board were also elected at the 2000 convention, including Rev. Dennis Okholm, the

first oblate to serve on the board. Dennis was also a Presbyterian pastor at the time (he has since been ordained as an Anglican priest), and as two "non-traditional, non-Roman Catholic monastics" with evangelical backgrounds, we found ourselves sharing some common ground. A few years later, when both of our sons hit some rough patches in their lives (which made rough patches in our lives), talking together at a subsequent ABA convention and promising to pray for one another's families was nothing less than an experience of grace. As I said, Mary Collins was correct on both counts: ABA has been good for me personally and it has been immensely helpful to the Community of Jesus.

We all have stories like this to tell. ABA has been the venue for inspiring ideas as well as relationships and, over the years, we have all been beneficiaries. It just so happens that my particular story, and Dennis', and some others', include this piece that has to do with "non-traditional" monastic life or, perhaps put better, with "new expressions" of the Benedictine charism, like Protestant oblates and ecumenical monasteries. And ABA has spread out its tent pegs to make room for such daughters and sons of Benedict. Below, in the first of a series of articles offered by the main speakers for our 2014 convention ("Benedictine Monasticism: The Past Receiving the Future") Father Joel Ripinger considers the interchange that is taking place between these "new expressions" and the "revered legacy" of



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www.americanbenedictine.org

monastic life, and raises some pointed questions that must be considered in the dialogue. He calls it “Furthering the Conversation,” which is exactly what ABA is endeavoring to do.

Martin Shannon, ABA President
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* * * * *

Furthering the Conversation

It seems I have been designated a “well-rooted Benedictine” who can contribute to the conversation of how future modes of Benedictine life might benefit from the tradition and structures of the past.

Objectivity in this conversation is not easy. I am a vowed monastic of 44 years, linked to a tradition that finds inspiration in a man who wrote a rule almost 1500 years ago. Nor does my predilection for studying history necessarily make my task any easier. However, I have learned enough from the history of monasticism and Benedictine life to know that it has had a genius for adaptability and reconfiguration as it has traveled the course of centuries and cultures. I believe that the lessons learned therein can serve us well as we try to determine the manner in which new expressions of monastic life will intersect with a revered legacy of practice and teaching.

What I would like to offer as a method and model for such a process are two valued practices of our tradition: antiphonal prayer and *lectio divina*. In both of these we enter into a rhythm of listening and responding, reflecting and acting. Such should be the mode of any real discernment of “where and how we go from here.”

One can begin with a paradox: never has monastic life (in all its contemporary broad canvas) been more affirmed and never has its future been more uncertain. While a consensus on the values passed on from Benedictine tradition may be readily arrived at, the procedure for giving them practical application teases us with too many possibilities.

Perhaps a deep reading and listening to several pointed questions will spark an equally deep response. What makes the *Rule of Benedict*, like Scripture, a living document? How do we avoid the two extremes of either making it a museum piece fossilized in amber or using it as a procrustean bed, capable of conforming to any variety of our spiritual agendas? We can proceed to even more pointed questions: what are the core elements that need to be in place for any new expression of monasticism? Are vows needed? Is there a reason for a cloister or habit? What type of relationship to the Church is required? To whom are we accountable? Other questions engage us on a

practical level: What of a skill set for any monastic? Is there still relevance for learning how to sing Gregorian chant, hone the practice of proclaiming the Word of God, or cultivate a craft?

Such questions will, I trust, form the basis of any serious enterprise that expects to call itself monastic in future years. Anyone with even a limited perspective on monastic life knows that it has reinvented itself continually down through the centuries. However to reinvent itself in the twenty-first century, monasticism needs more than mere spiritual dilettantes.

So here is the modest if not minimalist standard that I suggest needs to stay in place: 1) We need to see any form of monastic life as centered on the person of Christ, for it is not only a relationship with Christ that hangs in the balance but the salvation of our souls. That is not to exclude ecumenical monastic models, but it requires that we are always propelled by and led back to the person of Jesus Christ. 2) We also need to see that genuine monastic life is a lifelong affair. Whether we begin at 20 or 50, we live it until we are in the cemetery. There may be new modes of temporary monastic witness, but monasticism loses its staying power when “in the monastery until death” is no longer in the equation. 3) Finally, there must be a monastic community life that is characterized by symbols and rituals that absorb the person in a daily rhythm. Without a vibrant community life, we leave ourselves exposed to the toxic threat of individualism that has become by now a global spiritual pandemic.

May the conversation continue in coming months and be enlivened by the contributions of all who treasure the gift of monastic life.

Joel Ripinger, OSB

Father Joel, a past president of the American Benedictine Academy (1994–1996) is a monk of Marmion Abbey, Aurora, Illinois, where he works as oblate director and archivist (among other things). He is an instructor at Marmion Academy, where he also serves as the faculty/staff chaplain. Father Joel holds graduate degrees in American history from Notre Dame and in monastic studies from Sant’ Anselmo in Rome. He has written numerous articles on issues pertaining to monastic history and spirituality, and is the author of The Benedictine Order in the United States: An Interpretive History (Liturgical Press, 1990). Anyone who knows Father Joel knows that, to all of this work, he brings a contagious love of history and the monastic tradition, which is also why he has been asked to be a presenter at the 2014 ABA convention. He is, as he states in his article for this issue of AMN, a “well-rooted Benedictine,” and an articulate one at that, making his a trusted voice in the conversation we are having between “old” and “new” expressions of Benedictine monasticism. M.S.

CANON LAW COLUMN

The Canonical Concept Of Total Renunciation in the Monastic Tradition

Often when people learn that Benedictines don't profess the three vows that most religious do at the time of profession they wonder what the difference is. Benedictines make monastic profession and promise stability, obedience and conversatio (fidelity to the monastic way of life) whereas most members of religious communities profess the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. This is because St. Benedict's rule predates canon law on religious life. Certainly poverty and chastity are included in the monastic way of life by its very nature. It is monastic poverty expressed by total renunciation about which I write here.

In the *Rule of St. Benedict*, in Chapter 58 on "the Procedure for Receiving Monks," after coming before the whole community in the oratory and promising stability, fidelity to monastic life and obedience, Benedict says, "If [the monk] has any possessions, he should either give them to the poor beforehand, or make a formal donation of them to the monastery, without keeping back a single thing for himself, well aware that from that day he will not have even his own body at his disposal. Then and there in the oratory, he is to be stripped of everything of his own that he is wearing and clothed in what belongs to the monastery" (RB 58: 24-26). This is startling – one must be stripped and be aware that not even our own bodies are ours! But when one is stripped of his/her own clothing, then Benedict says the monastic is to wear what belongs to the monastery. Being stripped isn't the end of it, as startling as it may be. Rather, the reminder when a monastic is clothed with what belongs to the monastery is that now the monastic's life is as a member of the monastic community, no longer an individual making her/his own decisions but now within the context of a community of sisters or brothers under a rule and a monastic superior. Indeed, according to some monastic commentators, the very purpose of total renunciation is for peace and unity within the monastic community. Renouncing one's goods, and indeed one's own will, is a great equalizer in the community. There is no poor and rich distinction, rather all are poor in owning nothing and being provided whatever they need.

Throughout the Rule it is clear that a monastic does not live in isolation as a hermit (unless special permission is given) but rather as a brother or sister in the monastery, with an abbot or abbess/prioress and other brothers or sisters with whom he/she has cast his/her lot. In Chapter 33 on "Monks and Private Ownership," St. Benedict underlines that renunciation of self doesn't end with the profession ceremony but must continue daily

until death in the monastery. Quoting from the Acts of the Apostles, Benedict says that "All things should be the common possession of all . . . so that no one presumes to call anything his own" (RB 33:6). Benedict refers to private ownership as an "evil practice [that] must be uprooted and removed from the monastery" (RB 33:1). He goes on to explain: "We mean that without an order from the abbot, no one may presume to give, receive or retain anything as his own, nothing at all – not a book, writing tablets or stylus – in short, not a single item, especially since monks may not have the free disposal even of their own bodies and wills. For their needs, they are to look to the father of the monastery . . ." (RB 33: 2-5). This is not poverty for poverty's sake, but rather a renunciation of even our own wills for the sake of living in the monastery because this is a monastic's way to go to God. "Monastic poverty is meant to help us reach our goal of contemplative, mystical union with God. In other words, poverty is for the monk and not the monk for poverty." Whatever we have in the monastery is not held as our own but held for the good of all; and, because it is for the good of all, Benedict counsels that all things are to be treated as "sacred vessels of the altar" (RB 31:10). "Whoever fails to keep the things belonging to the monastery clean or treats them carelessly should be reproved" (RB 32:4).

Benedict understands that it is easy for the "evil practice of private ownership" to creep in, and so he provides for frequent inspection of beds "lest private possessions be found there" (RB 55:16). But again, this is not for poverty's sake, because the members of the monastery are to be provided with what they need (RB 55: 18-19: "In order that this vice of private ownership may be completely uprooted, the abbot is to provide all things necessary . . . In this way every excuse of lacking some necessity will be taken away"). Each monastic is provided with what he/she needs - some need more, some less. That which is needed is to be the measure of what each monastic has, not our consumerist desire to possess more and more.

The Code of Canon Law gives a description of the vow of poverty, but leaves it to each religious community to determine its contours: "The evangelical counsel of poverty, in imitation of Christ who, although He was rich became poor for us, entails, besides a life which is poor in fact and in spirit, a life of labor lived in moderation and foreign to earthly riches, a dependence and a limitation in the use and disposition of goods according the norm of the proper law of each institute" (Canon 600). As Benedictines, our proper law is the *Rule of Benedict* along with our own congregation's or federation's constitutions as well as our monastery's local norms. "Because the evangelical principle of poverty deals with material goods and their use, its practice varies considerably according to the particular purpose of each Congregation or Institute. No other element of religious profession depends so much on the

spirit in which it is practiced. With no other element, therefore, is it so important to understand the particular nature of the religious Institute in which you live. ... The reason for these differences is simply that poverty is a means to something better, namely, total love expressed in the fulfillment of one's particular vocation."

Nonetheless, the Code does spell out some particulars about possession of property by religious. In canon 668 regarding ceding administration of goods and making a will, there are special provisions for those who, like Benedictines, have the tradition of total renunciation: "Professed religious who have fully renounced all their goods *because of the nature of the institute* lose the capacity of acquiring and possessing, and therefore, invalidly place acts contrary to the vow of poverty. Moreover, those things which accrue to them after the act of renunciation belong to the institute, according to the norm of proper law" Canon 668, §5 (emphasis added). The nature of our life as Benedictines, as noted in the Rule above, includes this notion of total renunciation. We no longer can call anything our own or treat anything (or *anyone* for that matter) as our own.

This same canon provides that "whatever a religious acquires through personal work or by reason of the institute is acquired for the institute" (Canon 668, §3). The canon adds that unless provided otherwise by the proper law of a religious community, "those things which accrue to a religious by way of pension, subsidy or insurance in any way whatever are acquired for the institute." While civil law does not have this understanding, our canonical obligation does require that anything we acquire is for the community, not for ourselves. In regard to civil law, we are bound to make our renunciation "in a form which, if possible, is also valid in civil law" (Canon 668, §4. See also canon 668, §1 regarding wills which are also to be civilly valid).

Total renunciation is more than a canonical obligation to own nothing. Rather, it must be a habit of the heart. Not claiming anything as our own, but recognizing and treating all things as goods and tools of the monastery must be our way of life. It doesn't mean it is easy, that it is not tempting to want and acquire new things and gadgets. Nonetheless, as monastics, we do renounce all in favor of our commitment to faithfully live according to the monastic way of life. Benedict reminds us that monastics, in their good zeal, are to "prefer nothing whatever to Christ" (RB 72: 11-12). Preferring Christ over things, over people, indeed over one's very self, for monastics means a total renunciation of all that is not Christ.

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The writer of this column welcomes ideas for future topics. Send your questions and suggestions to <lynnmckenzieosb@gmail.com>

BOOK REVIEWS

St. Basil, *The Rule of St. Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, translated by Ann M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press [Michael Glazier], 2013) ISBN 978-0-8146-8212-8, \$89.95.

Despite the high price, this new edition of Basil's monastic writing should be an indispensable resource for any monastic library or formation program. Silvas has brought her substantial expertise to bear on the translation and annotation of the Latin edition, and has also included three questions and answers that are found only in the Syriac version.

As Basil visited fourth century monastic foundations, he answered questions that were posed about every aspect of the monastic life. They were first gathered in what was called the *Small Asketicon* and later were promoted as his "rule" in a Latin version done by Rufinus in 397. Just how important this rule was for Benedict is indicated by his instruction that his own rule is only a beginning. He points every reader directly, by name, to "the rule of our holy father Basil."

It has been difficult to seriously pursue that advice with the versions that have been available to the average English speaker. Now, there is something for both the advanced scholar and the novitiate student as the 203 questions and answers are presented in Latin and English facing pages with copious analysis of the language and its nuances in the footnotes (not unlike the *RB80* version of the *Rule of St. Benedict*).

This volume will allow readers to see the intersection with the thinking of St. Benedict, the source which formed one of his primary underpinnings, and the deep connections which Benedict himself confirms. If Benedict says to read it, what more recommendation does a monastic need?

* * * * *

Irene Nowell, OSB. *Pleading, Cursing, Praising: Conversing With God Through the Psalms* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2013) ISBN 978-0-8146-3517-9, \$12.95.

A thinner (and far less pricey) resource than the one reviewed above, but also very useful for beginner or expert is this little book by one of the foremost monastic scholars of the Old Testament. In a very conversational and accessible manner, the author summarizes the three basic messages of the psalms and then provides exercises by which the reader can come to appreciate the psalm experiences of one's own life. This is a book that is directed straight at the heart, which is what the psalms should always be about.

to invite me was Mother of God Monastery in Watertown, S.D. I was very impressed by the Benedictine women I met there, especially their warm hospitality. I was also touched, when at the end of our stay there, the sisters raised their arms over my husband and me and sang a parting benediction.

In March 2007, I received a request to present a program called "Touching the Sacred through Poetry" at Mount St. Scholastica Monastery and Benedictine College in Atchison. The invitation came from Sister Thomasita Homan. In the small world category, I had once worked with her brother Dick Homan at *The Washington Post*. Dick had read *Twenty Poems to Nourish Your Soul* and had passed it on to Sister Thomasita, then an English professor at Benedictine College. At Mount St. Scholastica, you were subsumed by hospitality the minute you walked in the place.

One of the first sisters I met was Sister Lillian Harrington, who was about to celebrate her 90th birthday. I've always had this obsessive anxiety about death (probably from having had older parents whom I always feared as a child would die and leave me abandoned). I asked Sister Lillian if, at her advanced age, she ever thinks about the moment of death. She told me something I've never forgotten. "I don't think about dying," she said. "I think about living."

I began to realize over the course of that three-day visit to the Mount that these sisters had something to teach me about life that I couldn't find in all the self-help books lining the shelves of Barnes & Noble. At the end of our stay, I casually mentioned to Sister Thomasita that I would like to return to the Mount some day and do some extended interviews of the sisters. Of course, I never thought I really would return. But a year later, Sister Thomasita called me and said the community was planning for its 150th jubilee in 2013. Was I still interested in writing about their community life? I sure was. I thought I was going there to write about the lives of the sisters. At some point, I began writing about the effect that getting to know these sisters and their stories was having on me. That became the genesis of my book *Atchison Blue*.

What has attracted you and drawn you more deeply into presenting monastic life to the wider world?

I had a kind of startling experience on my very first visit to the Mount. Before any of the workshop participants arrived, I had a chance to sit alone in the choir chapel. Silence seemed to saturate the room. This visit came at the end of a particularly hectic period for me when I was dashing from city to city giving presentations on weekends all the while doing my regular journalistic work during

the week. I was also newly married at the time, a part of a blended family, and struggling with all the land mines that involves. At a certain point my eyes rested on an image of St. Benedict in one of the stained glass windows. He was surrounded by the words "Omni tempore silentio debent studere." I reached back into my high school and college Latin and did a rough translation. "At all times, cultivate silence." In that moment I realized that I had been talking and talking to retreat groups trying to help others live a more contemplative life when what was missing in my own life were simple moments of silence and solitude. Without them, I was losing drop by drop the resources I needed to do my work well and cultivate an inner life. Sitting there alone in the chapel, I did something that was totally out of character. I wept. I had the sense that something was shifting inside of me though I couldn't have defined it or explained it then. I just knew there was something more to this thing called monastic life and I wanted more of it.

This seems to have really affected your personal life, including your recent decision to make oblation. What made you think that this "monastic thing" was more important to you than just an interesting topic to write about as an objective onlooker?

You can't be around Benedictines for long and not be changed by them! You can't remain a mere observer. They won't let you! Actually, I never thought I would become an oblate. It wasn't on my radar screen even when I began writing about the Mount sisters. But I realized more and more that the Benedictine way is really a sane way, a practical way of living. And so I wanted to formalize the way I practiced Benedictine spirituality – listening instead of always having my say, being the first to show respect to the other, looking for ways to praise, not tear down, being cooperative not competitive. I also wanted to feel as though I was a "dues-paying member" of this very non-exclusive club. As an oblate, I feel part of something larger than myself, the entire worldwide family of those who approach the world with a Benedictine heart. When I spoke my oblate vows, it felt very similar to when I had taken my wedding vows. I remember standing at the altar and saying those words and sensing viscerally that at that moment, something very profound had changed in my relationship with my husband. This wasn't just for sometimes, it was now for keeps. And that is how I experienced my oblate vows.

*Why do you think it is so important to tell our stories?
What do you think we have to say to contemporary culture?*

Monastics have a great deal to say to contemporary culture! Before I began visiting monasteries, I used to think of monastic life as a hopeless throwback to the past – a case of let the last monk/ last sister standing turn out the lights. Now I view monastic life as a window to the future, a future we desperately need in our society – one that stresses community over competition, simplicity over self-aggrandizement, silence over the constant chatter of our 24/7 world. Just look at the violence in our world, the fragmentation in our political discourse, the greed and self-absorption that has led to our economic crisis. As a working journalist, I've had a front row seat to all of that mess. It drives home how much the world needs Benedictine wisdom, Benedictine values. To my mind, Benedictines live out what St. Francis once urged: preach the gospel always; use words if necessary. As the great Mount sister Sister Kathleen Egan once told me: "The Benedictine way is a very simple and healthy way of living. It considers life a gift, a gift worth cherishing."

This is your opportunity not just to write about us, but to speak directly to us. Is there anything else you would like to say to monastics based on your experience and on reactions to your pieces that you have heard from others?

With the dwindling number of vocations, it's understandable that some in monastic life may fret that they joined a failing enterprise. But I firmly believe the world owes a great debt to the people in monastic life. I always think of that journal entry Thomas Merton wrote after his first extended visit to Gethsemani: "Now I know what has been holding the world together and keeping it from falling to pieces."

I think monastics hold the world together every time they celebrate the liturgy of the hours. I take great comfort in knowing that every day a group of men and women is awake before dawn, praying to make the world a saner place. The number of new people entering, or not entering, doesn't change that. I don't care if it's one or two people gathered, what you do as monastics, the witness you give, is both significant and necessary.

I believe people today are hungering for Benedictine values though they may not know how to label that hunger. How else would you describe the reaction to the piece I published in *The Kansas City Star* about the death of one of the Mount sisters? There were so many email responses from readers that they clogged the paper's inbox. I myself must have received 20 emails about the article on my website.

I realize it may seem to some as if they are living in the "end times" of monastic communities. But as Thomas Merton pointed out, rightly I believe, there will always be a place for monastic life, because the world will always need signs of contradiction. I think no matter the time we live in, monastics will always stand for community, for compassion, for creativity, for counter-conventional wisdom. And that is a very good thing.

*For more on this author, see her website
www.judyvalente.com*



NEWS

In recent elections, the sisters of Monastery Immaculate Conception (Ferdinand, Ind.) elected Sister Barbara Lynn Schmitz, OSB, as their prioress.

Abbot Edmund Boyce announced in April that he would resign as abbot of St. Benedict's Abbey in Benet Lake, Wisc. After much prayerful deliberation, the community has requested to become a dependent house of Conception Abbey (Conception, Mo.) with the abbot of Conception acting as their administrator.

The monks of Saint John's Abbey (Collegeville, Minn.), and the world of liturgical studies, mourn the death of Father Kevin Seasoltz, OSB, a prominent scholar and professor, as well as the editor of the journal *Worship*. He had served on the faculty of Saint John's School of Theology, was a frequent speaker and retreat director, and wrote numerous books and articles on liturgy, aesthetics, church architecture, ministry, the sacraments (especially the Eucharist), spirituality, religious life, and canon law.

The Benedictine Monastery of Hawaii altered its status from being part of the Olivetan Congregation to being an independent diocesan organization. Its mission and work remain unchanged. Bishop Larry Silva established the two Benedictine priests and four Benedictine sisters who comprise the community as a public association of the Christian faithful under his authority. He also approved the monastery's new statutes describing the community's way of life, values and rules.

The February issue of AMN included a statement on immigration reform from the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses' annual meeting in Tucson, Ariz. After the meeting they also adopted a public statement on gun control as follows:

Prevention of Gun Violence

A Statement of the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses

March 21, 2013

As Benedictine monastic women we stand united in a 1500 year tradition, rooted in Gospel values of peace and non-violence. Our Benedictine way of life requires us not only to be people of peace but also “to foster peace in the society around us.” That peace is based on right relationships and mutual respect. Any violation of the rights and integrity of people, of the land, and of the environment is an act of violence. A definite culture of violence is pervasive in our society in movies, television programming, video games, music and advertisements. The proliferation of guns, both legal and illegal, has contributed to a significant increase in violence in the United States and in the drug wars in Mexico.

In 2010, guns took the lives of 31,076 Americans in homicides, suicides and unintentional shootings. This is the equivalent of more than 85 deaths each day and more than 3 deaths each hour. In Mexico, 15,273 died in drug war gun violence alone that same year. Over 68% of the traced guns used in crimes in Mexico between 2007 and 2010 came from the United States. The United States has the highest rate of gun-related injuries among developed countries, as well as the highest rate of gun ownership. Besides the deaths and tragedies for families, friends and associates, gun violence also affects society in other ways, including higher medical costs, reductions in quality of life because of fear of gun violence and stresses on the criminal justice system.

To help create healthier environments in families, schools and communities and to reduce the impact of gun-related violence, the American Psychological Association recommends multiple approaches, among which are education, training, access to mental health treatment, program funding and research. The Conference of Benedictine Prioresses endorses their recommendations.

In his holy rule, our founder St. Benedict states, “Your way of acting must be different from the world’s way.” We, the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses, are compelled to address the rampant culture of gun violence and disregard for human life. Therefore, in concert with statements issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, we call on lawmakers to:

- Close loopholes and require every person who buys a gun to pass a criminal background check.
- Ban the sale of assault style weapons and high capacity ammunition magazines.
- Make gun trafficking a federal crime.
- Strengthen federal laws to stem the flow of American weapons that contribute to the drug trafficking violence in Mexico.
- Fund robust care for those with mental illness, ensuring that health insurance plans, Medicare and Medicaid offer mental health benefits at parity.
- Provide for early identification and intervention for children and young adults in need of mental health treatment.
- Increase the number of well-trained mental health professionals available for school and community gun violence prevention, intervention, threat assessment, and crisis management.
- End the freeze on gun violence research.
- Address the growing use of violence as a means of entertainment in films, television program, video games, music and advertisements.

ABA AT KALAMAZOO

This year at the forty-eighth International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University (May 9-12) the American Benedictine Academy sponsored a session on the “Contribution of Adalbert de Vogüé to Monastic Studies.” Three monastic scholars gave papers that were based on de Vogüé’s work and, in the discussion that followed, honored his memory with anecdotes and appreciations.

Sister Colleen Maura McGrane, OSB, of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (Clyde, Mo.), spoke about how function words helped de Vogüé establish the priority of the *Rule of the Master* to the *Rule of Benedict*. For example, the RB has twelve conjunctions and adverbs that are not found in the Master. De Vogüé suggested that the next step is to use statistical analysis to determine whether the same person wrote both. Sister Colleen took a step in that direction by a careful study of the use of *autem*. It is very common in RB (82 times), where it has various uses, but rare in RM, which suggests that the two works were written by different authors.

Father Hugh Feiss, OSB, of the Monastery of the Ascension (Jerome, Id.) studied the use of *cura* (charge, responsibility, cure, care) in the RB (13 times) and RM (18 times), using de Vogüé’s *Sources chrétiennes* editions of the two rules. Apart from three occurrences of “cura” in chapter two of both rules regarding the sort of man the abbot should be, RM and RB do not use the word in parallel. Most often the meaning of the word in both rules is the charge or responsibility that someone has. Otherwise, whereas the RM uses “cura” for the surveillance that deans and others exercise over monks or guests, St. Benedict most often uses it to remind the abbot and his officials of their responsibility before God, especially for those who are less strong in body or spirit. Thus, “cura” in the RM and RB seldom means “cure,” “care,” or “caring” in the contemporary senses of those words. The contrasting uses in the two rules manifest a very different outlook and suggest that a different person wrote each. This study of “cura” also showed how exact and unbiased were de Vogüé’s translations of the two rules.

Father Terrence Kardong, OSB, of Assumption Abbey (Richardton, N.D.), discussed a difficult translation problem in the Rule of Columbanus, in the contexts both of Columbanus’ monastic career

and teaching and of discussion of the Columbanian literature by de Vogüé in his *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l’antiquité*. Correcting previous translations, Father Terrence suggests that the passage in question should be the sage advice that “when a brother notices something out of line, but does not wish to report it to his immediate superior, but waits to tell the senior father, he shall merit three days of penance, unless he does this out of restraint. If some brother is upset . . . if he can bear up under it, he should postpone his report until his rancor has subsided and he can speak more restrainedly.”

At next year’s conference, we hope to sponsor a session on reading among medieval Benedictines. It is a rich topic embracing such areas as the cultural impact of RB’s emphasis on prayer in common, which called for both literacy and books; the exact nature of the “lectio divina” Benedict prescribed; table reading; how much and what monks read in the Middle Ages; what medieval Benedictines wrote about reading and books.

Anyone who would like to present a paper should consult Hugh Feiss, OSB, Monastery of the Ascension, 541 E. 100 S, Jerome, ID 83338, <hughf@idahomonks.org>.

Hugh Feiss
ABA session coordinator

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The Association of Benedictine Retreat Centers will hold a conference August 22-25 at St. Benedict’s Abbey in Benet Lake, Wisc. The theme of the conference is “All Are Welcome: Extending Hospitality to Those on the Margins.”

Keynote speakers and their topics are “Lesbian and Gay Catholics: What Does the Church Say About Them” - Rev. Bob Pierson, OSB; “Retreat Centers as Wildlife Sanctuaries: Safe Shelter for Endangered Spirits” - Dr. Sheila Nelson; and “Marriage and Remarriage: A Pastoral Response” - V. Rev. Charles Schramm

Workshops will include “Insights from Prison Ministry” - Kathleen Atkinson OSB; “Ministry to Non-present Young Adults: Exploring Lessons from Taizé” - Sam Rahberg; and “Personal Testimony from the Margins” - Fred, Carol and Michael John Weber.

All those working in retreat centers and retreat ministries associated with monastic communities are invited. More information is available at www.theabrc.org

SAVE THE DATES

This issue contains the first of the papers by speakers for the next American Benedictine Academy convention. Plan now to attend the biennial meeting next year and become a part of the conversation.

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