



Spiritual Connections

We hope you will find this communication about the symbolism of our profession ring both informative and interesting.

We hope that highlighting its significance with our friends will enhance your knowledge and understanding of what it means to be Benedictine women in the 21st Century.

Mission Statement

The Benedictine Sisters of Florida seek God in monastic community, prayer, and ministry.

Nourished by the Word of God and our life together, we respond with the compassion of Christ to feed the hungers of the people of God.

Vision Statement

We envision a community secure in God's love as we create sacred, safe spaces of help, hope, and prayer.

SYMBOLISM of the RING

FEBRUARY 2012

Some Background

This year on February 28th the Benedictine Sisters of Florida will celebrate the 123rd anniversary of our founding by five Sisters from Alleghany County, PA. To mark this day we would like to share with you the symbolism of our profession ring.

At her profession of perpetual (final) vows—a lifetime commitment—a Benedictine Sister at Holy Name Monastery, like Benedictine Sisters throughout the United States, have a simple gold and black ring placed on the ring finger of their left hand. In former times the ring, in European style, was placed on the right hand. However, after Vatican Council II when most Sisters were wearing contemporary clothing, we (younger members) changed our rings to the left hand in the manner of American women's wedding rings, a defining gesture to say "I am taken." Around the time of the switch from one hand to the other, a preschool child grabbed Sister Roberta's left hand, looked at the octagon shape on her ring and remarked, "That's the wrong letters. It's supposed to say S-T-O-P." Sister's quick response was, "It means the same thing!"



A ring is a traditional symbol of infinity or eternity. In a sense, the wearing of a ring binds the wearer with mystical energy. The materials in the ring plus the wearer's visualization, play a part in the nature of the energy. The appearance or attractiveness of a ring or its material value, are of little importance. The finger on which a ring is worn is purported to have some significance:

- The **thumb** or **willpower** finger emphasizes the importance of uniqueness, independence and freedom to the wearer.
- The **index** or **pointer** finger emphasizes leadership qualities, assertiveness and ambition, and the ability to make up one's own mind.
- The **middle** or **identity** finger, is associated with wisdom and dealing with responsibility and one's role in life. It announces "I am."
- The **fourth** or **ring** finger reflects creativity, well-being, affections, and compassion. The ring finger on the left hand is the only one with a direct connection to the heart.
- Wearing a ring on the **little** finger expresses attitudes toward personal relationships and denotes how appealing you consider yourself.

[A Little History](#)

The design of the profession ring worn by the majority of Benedictine women in North America can be traced back to the Abbey of Nonnberg in Salzburg, Austria. This Abbey of Benedictine women had contributed in 1035, some of their members to the founding of Saint Walburg Abbey in Eichstätt, Bavaria. According to the Nonnberg archivist, the ring was cast in 1348 and the drawings for it are preserved in their archives. To date, it is not known when the ring was adopted by the Eichstätt nuns and worn by their members who first came to North America.

[Symbolism](#)



As pictured here, the Benedictine ring has a narrow gold band with a black octagon shape that sits atop the finger. Three figures may be seen on the black crest: the letters “IHS,” a cross and three small spikes or nails.

The IHS is a monogram for the name of Jesus, derived from the Latin transliteration of the first three letters (iota, eta, sigma) of his name in Greek. From the third century onward, shortened names for Jesus began to appear in Christian inscriptions. These Greek monograms continued to be used in Latin during the Middle Ages and beyond.

With palm fronds around the band, a cross above the IHS, and three nails below, the designer illustrated the paschal mystery to which Benedictine life is meant to point. Thus, the ring is both about the cross and the palms of victory—about Good Friday and Easter Sunday, Christ’s death and glorious resurrection.

For nearly seven hundred years, the theology of the profession ring has been firmly fixed in the formation of Benedictine women. Those who follow Christ will rise with him. *“The ring is the mark of consistent commitment through good times and bad, through struggle and doubt, through unkindness and forgiveness, through suffering and hope, with the sureness of heart that says the struggle is worth it, that the struggle is blessed, that even the struggle itself is joy.”*

(Anonymous Reflection)

[Human Interest Note](#)

Our profession rings have initials engraved on the inside surface. For many of us it is the initials of our baptismal names. However, when a Sister dies, or severs her vowed relationship with the community, her ring may be “recycled” to a newly professed member. Thus continue the stories of the previous wearer of the ring. For instance, Sister Dianne has the ring that was previously worn by Jeanette (Ruffing) Reilly. Jeanette entered the community from our academy and spent over ten years as a teacher in our educational ministries. Although she left the community in the early 70s, Jeanette and her husband Pat continue to be treasured friends and supporters.

Sister Margaret Mary wears the ring that previously belonged to Sister Gabriel Whalton. Sister Gabriel was from Key West and had two nieces in our community: Sisters Gertrude and Ruth Whalton. In her later years, Sister Gabriel was often heard to say, *“I’m so deaf that I’m sure Gabriel blew his horn and I missed it.”*