



The Benedictine Tide

Benedictine Sisters of Florida

Touching Lives Through Prayer and Service

Spring 2024

BRIDGES

Ride the Wave



“Blessed are You, O God! You bring us to this year of jubilee and sustain us always in merciful Love! We give thanks and praise that you reveal Yourself to us and bring us together in this community. With grateful hearts we recall the holy Benedictine women who have gone before us in a pilgrimage of faith and hope which has brought us to this time in this holy place.” [135th Anniversary Prayer]

Dear Friends of the Benedictine Sisters of Florida:

In our anniversary year we, the Benedictine Sisters, are doing what, many years ago Isaiah the prophet predicted: “Behold, we are doing something new; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19 (adapted)) And, we want to share that news with you using the symbol of “bridges”. Let’s walk across a swinging bridge, high over a chasm created by when a meteor landed beneath our feet. The bridge sways, this feeling is new. It is unsettling but strangely comforting, similar to being rocked in the security of our mother’s loving arms.

As a symbol, a bridge can represent the idea of connection, transition, and the ability to overcome obstacles. It can symbolize moving from one phase of life to another, bridging the gap between different cultures or communities, or even a metaphorical bridge between ideas or perspectives.

S. Eileen recalls: While living in Ashtabula County, Ohio, I became familiar with many of its 19 covered bridges. I delivered the Cleveland Plain Dealer one summer and the route took me out into the county and over many of these bridges. Most were crossed on country roads, at night, without the aid of streetlights or reflective markers.

Not all bridges are made of wood or stone. We often encounter times of transition in our life, times when we move from one stage to another. These times of transition, these bridges, are either thrust upon us or are a result of a decision we ourselves have made.

We, the Benedictine Sisters of Florida, have come upon such a bridge on our life’s journey. We have taken a long, piercing look at our situation and prayed about our next steps. After multiple meetings and much communal and personal prayer and discernment, we have made the decision not to turn back or delay, but to cross our bridge to an unknown future. This decision sends us over the bridge and in a new direction. Effective immediately we will not be accepting future life-vowed members. We will continue to welcome Oblates and resident volunteers who choose to join us in our work of prayer and service. We will walk with women and men who are making a life decision and point them to communities that have an active formation program with qualified staff.

This decision has its roots in the 2010 Federation of St. Scholastica General Chapter shortly prior to our election discernment at which Sister Roberta Bailey was elected our prioress. One of the Chapter resolutions directed each of the 23 member monasteries to consider the tide of the times and construct a plan for their community’s future. Our “restructuring plan” was based on, at the time, a community of 17 vowed women. In the time since then we have had the joy of accepting Sr. Elizabeth Mathai as a new member. In spite of our best efforts, there have been no new sustained members since.

The community wishes to thank you for your continued support as we discerned our future over these past few years. This has been a challenging process with many moving parts, and we want to update you regarding our current status and proposed next steps.

In 2012 we hired a consulting company to lead the community in an in-depth period of long-range planning. The outcome is one many of you know. We sold property and buildings to Saint Leo University for their expansion. We began the two-year construction project of our present one-level dwelling on the site of our citrus grove which had been destroyed by disease.

From that plight in our grove sprung new life in the shape of our new house of 20 rooms with a few extra rooms for resident volunteers and occasional guests.

We slept in our new home for the first night on August 18, 2014. Jubilation rang out at our September 2014 public dedication and grand opening ceremony! God gifted us with a double rainbow during that first meal in our new dining room. A year later, thanks to a generous donor and many who contributed support, we added our guest quarters with 10 double rooms and common living spaces. (You're welcome to come see for yourself. Contact S Mary Clare at 352-588-7188 or maryclareneu@gmail.com).

In 2024 our motherhouse community demographic is a blend of 10 baby boomers and members of the greatest generation (ages 71 to 89). One of our Sisters, S. Jerome, is in Hospice Care at Concordia ALF in Tampa. Benedictine life however is designed for intergenerational living. It is not fair to accept members into a community that will, in all likelihood, have passed into eternal life within the next 20 years.

We will certainly continue to encourage women who are interested in the Benedictine life to discern with us and to contact other communities in the US.

We want to assure you we will continue to "age in place" as we pray and work daily. We are not afraid of this transition. We are in conversation with a Home Health Care corporation in the development of a Managed Care package. This will allow our Sisters to remain at home at the monastery as long as possible.

As with any life decision, this decision has been made easier knowing that we do so with the loving support of friends like each of you and with the guidance with our gracious God who has always, and will always, see us through.

Unlike the "postcard-like" covered bridges that S. Eileen and others of us have crossed, this one is alight with light of Christ, and marked with the guides of Roman Catholic faith and the sacraments.

We thank you for your support during our first 135 years. On behalf of the entire community, please know how grateful we continue to be for your partnership in living the way of Benedict and Scholastica. The beginning of the Rule of Benedict admonishes us to "listen carefully." As we enter this new stage in life together, that is exactly what we will continue to do with open hearts. Thank you for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers. Be assured you remain always in ours. "Let us prefer nothing to Christ, and may He bring all to everlasting life" (RB).

Sister Roberta Bailey

S. Roberta Bailey, OSB
S. Donna McWitt, OSB
S. Mary Davis, OSB
Ss. Elizabeth Mathai, OSB
S. Jean Ann, OSB
S. Miriam Cosgrove, OSB

Sister M. Romana Gomez, OSB
Ss. Margaret Mary Eblitt, OSB
Ss. Eileen Dunbar
Mary Clare Neuhofen, OSB

SAINT TERESA OF CALCUTTA: AN ENDURING BRIDGE OF GOD'S COMPASSION TO HUMANITY



St. Teresa of Calcutta's life reminds us that she was an enduring Bridge of God's Compassion to humanity and, connecting hearts across continents and reminding us of our shared responsibility to care for one another.

St. Teresa of Calcutta's dedicated life to serving the most vulnerable and marginalized and her unwavering commitment to alleviating suffering exemplifies the essence of compassion. With immense compassion, she ministered to the suffering, offering love, dignity, and a sense of belonging. She saw God in the eyes of those suffering and make it her mission to alleviate their pain. She believed that love and selflessness were the driving forces behind any act of kindness or charity.

She described compassion as "preventing eternal suffering over alleviating temporary pain, saving souls over saving lives." She lived by this definition, caring for those afflicted with HIV/AIDS, leprosy, and tuberculosis. She fearlessly immersed herself in the suffering of others, spreading God's love through her actions. Her compassion extended beyond physical care; it reached the depths of souls. She believed that material possessions provided only fleeting happiness, while prayer and service offered lasting fulfillment. Whether caring for the sick, comforting the dying, or embracing the abandoned, she showed that love and compassion transform lives. Through her example we learn that serving others is the path to lasting peace and joy. She saw the inherent dignity in every individual and dedicated her life to uplifting and empowering others. Her example serves as a reminder that we, too, have the power to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Her selfless work earned her widespread fame and numerous honors, including the prestigious 1979 Nobel Peace Prize. Her legacy continues to inspire generations, reminding us of all the power of empathy and service to humanity.

Her teachings and quotes continue to inspire and resonate with people from all walks of life. Her wisdom, such as "It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving," Every act of service matters. Whether caring for the sick, comforting the dying, or embracing the abandoned, she demonstrated that love and compassion transform lives. Love and compassion encourage us to find beauty in simplicity and to approach acts of kindness with a genuine and compassionate heart.

May the Lord grant us the grace that we, too may be able to follow in her footsteps, and be a bridge to God's compassion and love to humanity.

Sister Elizabeth Mathai

Community celebrates Benedictine Sisters

BY MARY RATHMAN, THE LAKER/LUTZ NEWS



The Saint Leo University community celebrated the 135th anniversary of the founding of the Benedictine Sisters of Florida on Feb. 28, the date in 1889 when five nuns arrived in rural East Pasco County from Pennsylvania to staff schools.

At the request of Father Gerald Pilz, OSB the nuns began teaching in San Antonio and St. Joseph, helping to create the school that would become Saint Leo University and to found the Benedictine Sisters of Florida.

During Saint Leo's lunch and program, Father John McEvoy gave the opening prayer and Town of St. Leo Mayor Mike D'Ambrosio read a proclamation, recognizing the 135th anniversary and in honor of the sisters' service to the community.

Sister Roberta Bailey, OSB, prioress of the Benedictine Sisters of Florida, acknowledged the significance of the occasion: "We are grateful for all that God has done for us throughout these 135 years since our founding sisters ventured forth from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to Pasco County, Florida. We've opened and withdrawn from schools — all still a credit to our transitional skills as they continue in some form to serve the founding purpose. Some changes were welcome and settled in easily; some sat uneasy on the sisters' shoulders as they responded to 'the call of our times,'" said Bailey in a news release.

From 1929 to 1959, the sisters operated St. Benedict's Prep school for boys. Holy Name Academy provided day and boarding programs for girls until 1964, according to the release.

"Shifting gears, we built new dormitories and a cafeteria to provide services to Saint Leo College students," Bailey said. "In 2014, we made the courageous decision to 'begin again' the great adventure of the Benedictine Sisters of Florida. We sold our property north of Highway (County Road) 52 to Saint Leo University and built a one-level house on a former citrus grove across the highway."

The prioress also noted the many careers the sisters have had: classroom teachers, principal, mission superior, CCD teachers and coordinators, and "mom" at Good Counsel Camp. The Benedictine Sisters of Florida have served as archivists, hospice volunteers, health care providers, laundry and kitchen staff, seamstresses, artists and more.

"The Benedictine Sisters, and the monks, offer an example of flexibility, perseverance and stability. Their many friends within and outside our community clearly pay tribute to our sense of radical Benedictine hospitality. In conclusion, the Benedictine Sisters of Florida continue to 'do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, thanking God through him," said Bailey.



A group of us (sisters and volunteers) attended the matinee showing of the movie "Cabrini" on March 16th at the Zephyrhills Cinema 10. Janet Collura paid for the tickets. We are holding a movie poster that the theater staff gave us to take home.

A Surprise Gift and Blessing from God!

I am Sister Sharon Nohner, a Sister from St. Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota. I have been a professed member of my Monastic community for 54 years. Every time I think God could never match a life lesson gift, God comes around the corner in a unique person I had never met before, or in nature when the sun rises. I am embraced by the beauty and the kiss of God in the colors of the sky that are breathtaking. It happened again when I had the privilege of sharing the sabbatical time with one of our Sisters who asked and was granted some renewal time. She needed to be in the warmer weather and get the healing rays of the sun.

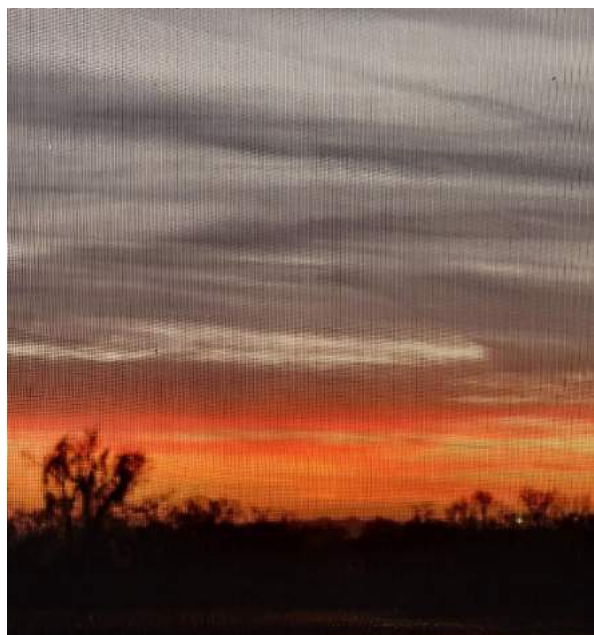
Searching for a renewing and healing environment we looked at monasteries that would be such a place. We were drawn to the Holy Name Monastery in St. Leo, Florida. The arrangements were made. Arriving in the dark the doors of the monastery opened and some Sisters and one of their Lay live-in Volunteers greeted us with kindness, a warm supper and engaging conversation. Immediately you sensed a spirit here of peace and welcome that certainly all were received as would Christ himself.

Going to a warmer and sunnier climate in the midst of winter was a gift! But that is the "wrapping paper and bow" of a long awaited gift. In order to enjoy the gift one has to "unwrap" to see the real treasure inside. It is in the very heart of each Sister in this community. Each giving of herself by the gift of presence at prayer, at table, in the dish room and most of all in the chapel around the Eucharistic table. They gather together to pray the Liturgy of the Hours three times a day as they hold the needs of the world daily in prayer.

The lovely walking paths around the grounds invited me daily to drink in the beauty, the quiet, the sun and yes, to my surprise a double rainbow one day!

I prepare to return home resolved to hold in memory each blessing moment of these days. Truly this community of Sisters have created, through the grace of God, a sacred place of healing and wholeness for all who come to their door.

May the special ministry of the Sisters of Holy Name Monastery in St. Leo, Florida continue to prosper as they serve and spread the Good News by their prayer, words and actions.



Soul Bridging



Srs. Celestine, Miriam and Alberta

It is a clear Monday morning in March after our weeklong aquaculture training and as I approach the greenhouse entrance. Thoughts of the past days flood my mind. Suddenly my attention changes upward in the serene silence. A juvenile eagle makes a distinct clear call. It is suspended a short distance above me. Its young wings beat rapidly as it strengthens them and makes its happy call over and over. Blessed assurance fills me as I witness nature's beauty and pray, "Thank you, Lord, I know you are here." My soul glories in the fleeting moment.

Going back many years ago, I recall a discussion with my priest brother Mark as to the understanding of what our soul is. It is a lifetime since that exchange and yet its memory still lingers on.

In 82 years of living life to its fullest, my definition of soul has intensified to center around the Christ-life within, around, and about every event and person we encounter either through God's Word, word of mouth or airwaves. All is maintained by definite bridges if our foundations are relational and strongly built. Many persons have misguided paths, feel no sense of purpose or happiness. Life's circumstances of poverty, violence, or better opportunities shape their daily lives. The aquaponics ministry and contemplative nature of this location seeks to make a difference in others' lives starting from the ground up.

Here for training were Benedictines Sister Alberta, a native of South Africa and Sister Celestine whose origin is Namibia. Their visit was made possible through a grant from AIM, the Alliance for International Monasticism and other sisters in the organization. Thankfully, the aquaponics path has made another giant leap to other countries and secured the relational bridge. These sisters came during their spring break studies at Benedictine University in Lisle, Illinois.

They were joined by three St. Leo University students, Kaylah, Luisa, and Chloe who are doing an internship in aquaculture and whose origins are the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and New York state. Various power points ranged from nutrition and disease, marketing ploys and sugar, understanding ecosystems and pesticides, tilapia characteristics (of course), to geography, to recycling wastes and countless global discussions. Natural disasters have hindered vegetative production and caused structural damage in Sister Alberta's monastery in South Africa and with her community's limited aid and resources, the plan for building an aquaponic system is only a distant dream.



Sr. Alberta

Beginnings are exciting for these young students and with this new learning immersion, our prayer is for them to continue a path that extends far beyond our present limited view and especially to the continent of Africa. The seeds have been planted in their soul and invigorated this fish farmer who will continue to look upward. AMEN.

Sister Miriam Cosgrove

Upcoming Events Calendar

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| May 26 | Oblate Sunday |
| June 10-15 | Sisters' Annual Retreat |
| July 11 | Summer Feast of St. Benedict |

The Pause that Renews

Are you looking for:

- A retreat opportunity?
- A location for your sabbatical?
- A relaxing vacation from the hectic world in which we live?
- A place to just be?

Fill Your Spirit!

Give yourself the gift of time away in quiet reflection; time away to concentrate on what you know is important; time to connect with your deeper self; time to just enjoy yourself!

New experiences, surroundings and people often inspire us in unexpected ways. The Benedictine Sisters of Florida strive to create an inviting space for all our guests.

You are Welcome Here!



In the beautiful rolling hills of Pasco County, FL, step into the quiet calm of our sunlit home -
Holy Name Monastery.

Tucked away from the rest of the world, you'll find your own comfortable place to recharge...a sanctuary from the bustle of everyday life.

You will be refreshed by hospitality in true Benedictine style. Time is yours to structure! Your stay includes a variety of amenities and opportunities:

- Guest rooms each with private bath
- Stroll/exercise along our prayer path
- Relax, reflect and enjoy nature's beauty
- Daily monastic prayer and Eucharist
- Explore the neighboring Grotto of St. Leo Abbey
- Close proximity to cultural and artistic attractions

RESERVE YOUR STAY TODAY!

12138 Wichers Rd, PO Box 2450
St. Leo, FL 33574-2450
Phone: (352) 588-8320
Fax: (352) 588-8319
Email: maryclareneu@gmail.com



Benedictine Sisters of Florida
Touching Lives through Prayer and Service

Heartfelt Thanks to our Donors for Your Support to our Annual Appeal 2023

Each of the following friends and supporters made a difference in our ability to “make ends meet”, reach out to others, and pray for you, your loved ones, the community and the world.

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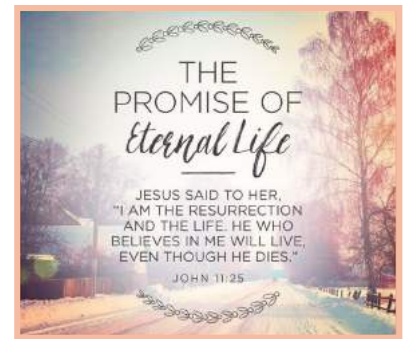


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