

Dear Friends,

***Behold, we are doing something new; now it springs forth,
do you not perceive it? Isaiah 43:19 (adapted)***

We Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Lisle are doing something new. The Holy Spirit has revealed to us our emerging future. Perceive it with us!

All organizations cycle through a ***birth*** period, a ***growth*** period, and finally a ***letting go*** period. Religious communities such as ours are no exception. Throughout these periods the Holy Spirit energizes us to spring forth and create new ways of being present to God's people.

Our ***birth*** period began with the first superior for Benedictine women in the United States, Mother Benedicta Riepp, O.S.B. Mother Benedicta and two other Sisters emigrated from St. Walburga's Monastery in Eichstätt, Bavaria. They formed St. Mary's Convent in St. Joseph, Pennsylvania in 1852. Our foundress, Mother Mary Nepomucene Jaeger, came from that community. She moved to Chicago in 1895 to minister to Czech-speaking Catholic immigrants. That was at the invitation of her brother, Abbot Nepomucene Jaeger, founder of St. Procopius Abbey.

Our ***growth*** period was underway. More Sisters joined the community and additional ministries and works mushroomed. We bought land in Lisle in 1905, and built our Monastery (Convent) in 1912. We operated a large farm which included orchards and award-winning Brown Swiss cattle.

We devoted ourselves to education ministries. Our Sisters taught in thirty-one parish schools in Illinois and five other states. We founded and operated St Joseph Bohemian Orphanage. We opened Sacred Heart Academy, a boarding school for girls, in 1925. We operated it right in the Monastery. It grew quickly, and in 1929, during the Great Depression, we built an addition to our building for the Academy. We financed the project with tax exempt bonds and contributions from our gracious donors.

Sister Judith Ann Heble, our immediate past Prioress, was Moderator (leader) of Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (CIB) for 12 years. This is an organization of all communities of Benedictine women worldwide. Through this relationship we got an opportunity to extend our ministry of education to women in Tanzania, Namibia, South Africa, and Vietnam. We have sponsored 12 women from religious communities in these countries; they live with us while earning undergraduate and graduate degrees at Benedictine University.

At the height of our numbers and ministries, we chose to merge Sacred Heart Academy with St. Procopius Academy for boys. The merger formed Benet Academy in 1967. The Sisters continued to teach and to serve in leadership roles at this co-educational secondary school.

The Sisters moved into the space vacated by the Academy. We spent more than a year discerning the use of what was to become known as the West Wing project. In 1987 we founded our Queen of Peace Center, a 32-unit independent living community located in the former Monastery. This ministry was a splendid way to manifest our Benedictine value of hospitality and to repurpose our building. We loved our residents and they loved us.

This initiative soon led to a need for assisted resident care, which we were not licensed to give. A Spirit-driven process of discernment and dialogue led us to a partnership with Benedictine Health System (now Benedictine) beginning in 2000. Benedictine is a nationally recognized non-profit senior care organization based in Minnesota. They own and manage skilled nursing, assisted living, and independent living communities across the Midwest.

Our partnership began with the expansion of Queen of Peace Center. Renamed Villa St. Benedict (VSB), this senior living community has grown to 197 units of independent living and 65 units of assisted living, including 14 memory support rooms.

We felt, and continue to feel, so at home with Benedictine's valuing and implementing our core values of hospitality, stewardship, respect and justice. Amplified by our spacious Sacred Heart Chapel, the campus has a strong Catholic, sacramental, and Benedictine identity.

Our *letting go* period has arrived. With guidance from the Holy Spirit, we have been planning for this since 2005. We have worked hard to ensure the future of our senior living ministry and to pass on our legacy. We will relinquish our responsibility of co-sponsoring Villa St. Benedict effective July 1, 2023. VSB will be a full member of Benedictine, with all the expert support of a nationally recognized leader in senior living.

We will continue to live and work on campus, secure and content in the knowledge that we have a home at Villa St. Benedict. The Sisters, VSB staff, residents, and families will notice little change. We will continue to be present to our residents and to pass on and grow our Catholic, Benedictine legacy which began in 1895.

Throughout all of these cycles of our community, our profound gratitude for our friends and donors has been a constant. Thank you! God Bless You!

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Peace,

Sister Mary Bratsovsky, O.S.B.

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Prioress