

Lisle Benedictine Women

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Sacred Heart Monastery

December 2025



***“Now thank we all our God,
With heart, and hands, and voices ...”***

“Now Thank We All Our God” (text: Martin Rinkart)

Message from the Prioress...

Thanksgiving/Christmas: seasons to not only be grateful, but to actually express our thanks to others. No doubt, most of you have sent cards, made telephone calls, texted, cooked or contributed to meals and shared Thanksgiving and Christmas time with family and friends. This celebration time of the year is special, inviting us to take time to reflect upon and name those acts that create the attitude of gratitude.

Our petitions at our Eucharist of Thanksgiving included: first and foremost, we are grateful to our God who gave his life that we might have life everlasting. We prayed for all who enhance our lives and are present to us: our biological families, our family of residents at Villa St. Benedict, and our families of volunteers, employees and friends.



I want you to hear and feel the Sisters' and my gratitude for all who support and care for us. We give thanks and continue to pass on our legacies.

It has been my personal privilege and joy over the years to tend to Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto. This year, with a decent amount of rain and hard work from my core group of volunteers, the grotto and flowers were at their best, making this an enviable meditation space.

The spring bulbs have been planted. They now are hiding under the snow, awaiting winter to prepare them for spring, summer and fall beauty. The life, growing and dying seasons of plants echo our Liturgical year. Life and death moments are shared that give us opportunities to be fed, to be in awe and to express gratitude for the LIFE - GIVING SEED which has made heaven possible for us by His life, death and Resurrection. Let us be grateful for this SEED, who became incarnate over 2,000 years ago.

I look to the words from Scripture, especially those of the Prophet Isaiah, and reflect on the characteristics of the Messianic King. I read of leadership empowered by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, where justice prevails, where all people are challenged to take care, love and get along with others - even their enemies, as did Jesus. Our role is to continue this Christ-like leadership. I am grateful to the Holy Spirit and our Cardinals, who in prayerful discernment provided the Church with Pope Leo, who speaks out and models these characteristics.

The Christmas season ends with the Baptism of Jesus, which this year is January 11, 2026. For various reasons, this newsletter is being sent out later than usual. However, I pray that you and I continue this season of Thanksgiving/Christmas throughout the year. May we allow the spirit of gratitude to awake in us an intense appreciation for others and, more importantly, to be grateful for the gift of Jesus becoming one of us that we might be Christ to one another.

Be empowered!

Sister Mary Bratsosky, O.S.B.

May She Rest in the Peace of the Lord



Sister Lois Jean Jensik, OSB
March 6, 1936 – July 23, 2025

by Sister Christine Kouba, OSB

Sister Lois Jean Jensik, OSB, was born in Chicago on March 6, 1936, to Louis Jensik and Barbara Pipek Jensik. Their family parish affiliation at that time was St. Ludmilla Parish in Chicago, where she was baptized on March 22, 1936. The family became members of Our Lady of the Mount Parish in Cicero by the time she was old enough to go to school. There she completed her eight years of elementary education and received the sacrament of confirmation in October of 1945.

One of her fond memories at Our Lady of the Mount School was the beginning of each school year. She and her cousin Mary Ann would watch the Sisters coming to Mass on Sundays to see which Sisters came back from Lisle, and hoping there would be new ones among them too; then trying to figure out which Sister would be their teacher that year. Her greatest joy, however, was

at nine years old, when her brother John was born. She couldn't wait to announce to her classmates the good news of becoming a big sister, and having John to grow up with her.

Lois Jean first attended high school at Nazareth Academy in La Grange, as the family had moved to the western suburb of Westmont where they became members of Holy Trinity Parish. However, holding the memory of a visit in Lisle with the Benedictine Sisters, she was drawn to Sacred Heart Academy for her two final high school years. With her parents' blessing she became a boarding student at Sacred Heart. This experience became her preparation for joining the Benedictine Sisters at Sacred Heart Convent (later named Sacred Heart Monastery).

When Lois Jean graduated from Sacred Heart Academy in 1953, she was 18 years old and immediately made plans to become a postulant at Sacred Heart. As her father was driving her to the convent he pulled off the road to give her his fatherly advice. He spoke words similar to these: "Lois, this is your future home, and once you enter you are there for life. You will need to live there in good times and in tough times. The important thing is that you keep your commitment." For the rest of her life, she felt these words were very perceptive and she never forgot them, carrying them in her mind and heart, often reflecting on them and being grateful for her Dad's wisdom. When she wavered, she remembered his advice. His words kept her on the right track when she might be tempted to take a different road.

Once she completed both postulancy and her novitiate years by 1955, she was ready for the first vows of Stability, Conversion of Life and Obedience. In 1958 she made these vows for life and was ready to serve. Her prioress sent her to

SS. Cyril and Methodius School in Joliet to accompany the teaching Sisters as an observer and aid in their classrooms. After two years there, she was sent to St. Benedict's Home for the Aged in Niles, Our Lady of Lourdes School in Chicago and then back to Sacred Heart in Lisle. This gave her an education of experiences with elderly people, children of different races, and a feeling of being a responsible adult. She also took summer credit courses through the years to sharpen her knowledge for her committed assignments.

Returning from the missions to Sacred Heart she became an Aide at the Montessori School, a new teaching facility for primary students when the Academy had closed, along with doing other miscellaneous activities such as hand crafts, especially embroidery. Her joy was even brighter when, along with Sister Paula, one of her miscellaneous duties was to take care of a baby girl, later a little boy, and still later a physically disabled older boy while their Moms went to work. In these positions she really thrived as she took care of Michelle, then Christian and lastly Ernie. These three children were precious to her. And they never forgot her as they stayed in touch to this very day. Sister Lois Jean was grateful for each one of them and treasured them as her own.

In her retirement years, Lois Jean accepted her role as the door keeper or concierge which was a job that fit her well. She loved to greet people, connect them with who they came to see and remembered their names for the future. This service at the front desk, answering the phone and welcoming people was very important since at that time the Sisters did not have private phones. Communicating messages well-delivered was vital and the Sisters appreciated her responsible service.

As a Benedictine community member, Sister Lois Jean loved the monastic life, namely, the liturgy of the Divine Office, the Eucharist and her monastic vows. She felt privileged to have spent

most of her years at the motherhouse where the liturgy was observed in its fullness, Gregorian Chant and all. Her love of our beautiful chapel brought her often to watch the sacristans, Sisters Regis and Gemma, preparing for Mass and treating the sacred vessels with reverence. Later, when the role of sacristan became her responsibility for several years, she felt privileged to work so close in God's sacramental presence. She often marveled how the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the high altar, with his outstretched arms of welcome, beckoned her to this community when she was a young student.

She was as well very mindful of the early Sisters who sacrificed their lives to contribute to the flourishing years of our community's monastic life. How God must have been blessing them in their selfless ways of service in those founding, impoverished years and how lovingly they provided for us. She was full of amazement knowing that they experienced some monumental hardships but wanted to provide an easier, beautiful and more enjoyable life for us. With her interest in the Sisters' community history and her love of biographies, she became a developed story teller ... sometimes relating the plot in even a more exciting way to emphasize a comical incident allowing the listeners to laugh, promoting her ability to entertain them.

Anticipating the celebration of her Jubilee of 70 years as a vowed Benedictine Sister in October 2025, her health began to decline after May of 2025, necessitating Hospice Care. On the morning of July 23rd she completed her earthly journey, taking her last breath as the Sisters were assembling for morning prayer. It was a loving surrender of peace with God forever where she will celebrate the joyous occasion of her 70 Year Jubilee in the splendor of Heaven along with the Angelic Chorus. May God be praised for the gift of her life!



Lois Jean (on right) with cousin and best friend Mary Ann



First Profession (3rd from left)

Dear Friends of the Benedictine Sisters,

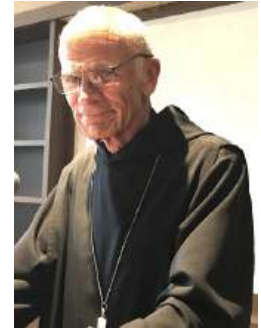
With our grateful thanks
for your love and kindness,
we remember you in a Novena of
Masses celebrated in our Chapel

December 24, 2025 –
January 1, 2026



Remaining Faithful to Our Call

Abbot Joel Rippinger, OSB, of Marmion Abbey in Aurora, delivered the retreat conferences to the Sisters and Oblates from June 16-20, 2025. His theme was to encourage them to remain faithful to their call in the midst of diminishment and change; then remembering the professional chant by trusting in God's mercy which states: "Sustain me, O Lord, according to your promise."



Though reflecting on the virtues from the Rule of Benedict written in the sixth century for those who dedicate their lives to living in community, Father Joel saw these virtues as forever new when interpreted with a contemporary approach. Community life experiences in living these virtues of steadfastness - daily attendance at community prayer or Divine Office, practicing Lectio Divina, patiently respecting the differences or weaknesses of others and supporting each other with the good zeal of mindfulness related to the stability - need only the love of Christ to bring all together to everlasting life.

The retreat ended during the Holy Mass on June 20th when the Sisters publicly renewed their Benedictine vows of Obedience, Stability and Conversion of life. This was their annual promise of remaining faithful to the call of living Benedictine Community life.



Sisters Susanne Thome and Christine Kouba take advantage of good weather and daylight whenever possible. They regularly pray the rosary as they walk the paths on the grounds, leading to Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto.



Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto

On October 7, the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, residents come to the grotto to pray the rosary. This year on that day, we also had a blessing of the new signs donated by the Kang Family Foundation, Inc.

Francie and Su-Pa Kang are pictured here with Sister Mary.



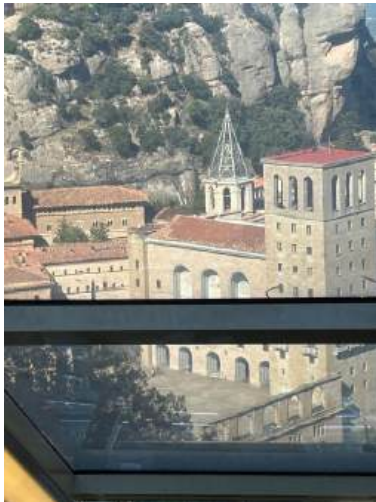
These plaques retell a short history of the grotto that had hitherto been displayed in glass-covered wooden frames. Sun and weather made replacement necessary. To enhance the quality and permanence of the display, we had three bronze plaques made by Cynosure Custom Signs. The script was designed by Sister Helen, Sister Mary and Cathy Cawiezel, our accountant.



Here and There . . .

This fall Sister Jo Anne Form had the pleasure of reconnecting with two special friends! Cecily Roland was Sister Jo Anne's student at Our Lady of Lourdes in Chicago. Janiece Longstreet worked at and lived next door to the school. She also helped Sister Jo Anne and Sister De Paul Stava sort, sell and distribute clothing which was donated from Carson Pirie Scott department store.

(L to R) Janiece, Sister Jo Anne, Cecily



In early September, Sister Helen Jilek and Cathy Cawiezel attended the Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum conference, where they enjoyed the hospitality of local Benedictines in Montserrat, Spain.

The CIB represents all communities of Benedictine women world-wide. Sister Helen and Cathy serve as CIB Treasurer and Accountant.

One of the highlights of the trip was an excursion into the mountains to visit the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat and its revered statue of the Black Madonna.

In June, Sister Helen Jilek and family members traveled to Namibia, where Sister Hyacintha Nepela served as their tour guide. Windhoek, the country's capital, served as their first base. Anxious to view wildlife, they visited Daan Viljoen Game Reserve. Walking trails, they spotted warthogs, giraffe, monkeys, water buffalo and impala. After a day spent street shopping in Windhoek, they took a long drive north to Etosha National Park for safari. They actually saw more animals while driving – large groups of zebra, springbok, and ostrich – than they did once inside the National Park.



Further north, they were guests of the Benedictine Sisters of Oshikuku, the community of Sister Hyacintha Nepela and Sister Celestine



Shakungu. They checked out the small local hospital (very basic, no computers) and toured the Sisters' complex. In Oshipeto, they spent time at the school that the Sisters run for very poor children. Before returning to Windhoek they managed a visit with Hyacintha's family and a stop at Dobra St. Joseph's RC High School, where Hyacintha had taught.



They traveled to Swakopmund on the coast, stopping by Pink Lake - its color a result of concentrated salt deposits. At Dorob National Park they enjoyed 4-

wheeler riding across the sand of the Namibian dunes. Returning to Windhoek, after family spending many hours and miles of driving together in a van, Sister Helen's family flew home.



Sisters Helen and Hyacintha continued to Durban, on the east coast of South Africa. They drove through many miles of sugar cane fields - did you know that sugar cane is grown 3 years before it is cut down?

They stayed a few nights with Sister Alberta Khwela's community, the Benedictine Sisters of Twasana, visiting the high school where these sisters work. And Hluhluwe Game Reserve offered more viewings of wildlife, including (finally!) elephants for Sister Helen.



Our Byzantine Sisters

- submitted by Sr. Barbara Pavlik, OSB

Greetings from Warren, Ohio!

In the early 1940's, the monks of St. Procopius Abbey and college had been commissioned by the Pope of Rome to accept and train men of the Byzantine Rite for ordination to the priesthood, because there was no Byzantine Rite Seminary in the USA at that time.

In the late 1940's, the Benedictine Sisters of Sacred Heart Convent in Lisle, Illinois decided to "follow suit" and accept and train women of the Byzantine Rite in order to eventually begin an Eastern Rite foundation of Benedictine Women. Two Eastern Rite women were accepted into the Lisle Community in 1951 – Sisters Miriam and Judith Konkus. Other vocations followed. Those were wonderful and happy years! Our formation was in Benedictine monastic life, but the reception into the Novitiate and the profession of both simple and final vows were made within the context of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy with our Eastern Rite bishop. This Roman Rite Community of almost 300 sisters not only learned to sing the responses of our Byzantine Divine Liturgy ... but they did it in 4-part harmony. It was so beautiful and almost like being in heaven!

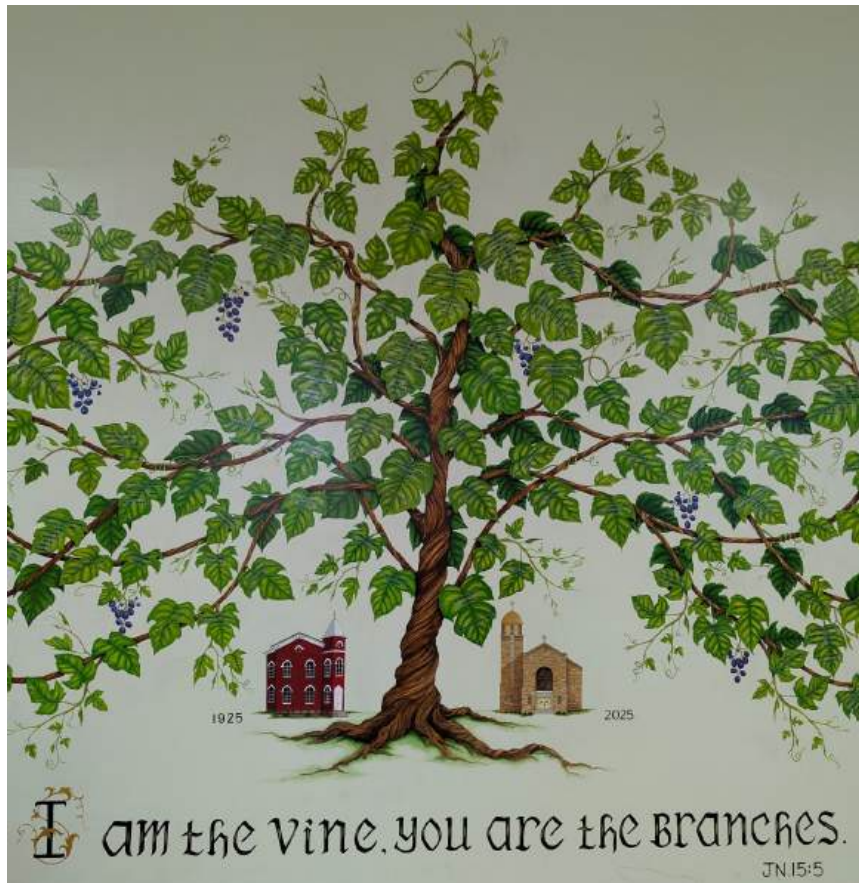
Fast forward to 1954: In response to pleas from Msgr. Sylvester Hladky, the sisters of Sacred Heart Convent voted to send sisters to SS. Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church, Warren, OH to staff the school. The parish provided living quarters on E. Market Street for the sisters, and the Warren mission was named Queen of Heaven Convent.

The sisters arrived in August of 1955 for the 1955-56 school year. Because the school building was still in the "planning stage", kindergarten, first and second grade classes were held in the sisters' convent. The following year, third grade was added. In 1957-58 school year, classes were held in the new school building, the beginning of SS. Peter and Paul School. The sixties, seventies and most of the eighties were the "heydays" of the school. There were double classes of each grade K-8, with an average class size of 35 to 40 students. The nineties brought a decline of enrollment of students, due to loss of the job market in Warren, Ohio area. SS. Peter and Paul School closed in June of 2005. The sisters have been part of SS. Peter and Paul Church and School for more than fifty years.

In 1965, all of the Byzantine Benedictine sisters came to live in Warren. The sisters built their own convent in Howland, about 4 miles east of Warren. In 1968, the Byzantine Benedictine sisters of Queen of Heaven Monastery were granted independent status from Rome. The sisters remained an independent monastery until 2010. Due to the lack of vocations, and the aging, illness and death of the sisters, Queen of Heaven Monastery again became a dependent monastery of Sacred Heart Monastery in Lisle. Today, two of the original Byzantine sisters remain, associated directly or indirectly, with SS. Peter and Paul Church in Warren, Ohio.

On June 29, 2025, SS. Peter and Paul Byzantine Catholic Church celebrated the centennial anniversary of the founding of their parish. The preparation for that 100-year celebration took an enormous amount of time and energy, but it was well worth it! The hierarchical Divine Liturgy was

beautiful! The displays and entertainment were spectacular and the food was plentiful and delicious! About 350 parishioners and guests attended the celebration. The fundraising committee worked very hard for almost three years, to ensure that all parishioners would be able to attend the celebration gratis.



In preparation for the celebration, the history committee wanted to leave a unique “legacy” for SS. Peter and Paul parish. After much research (many documents were written in old Slavonic) and information from family members, the committee was able to identify the true “founding fathers” of our parish. Most families were very cooperative in completing forms and supplying information regarding deceased relatives who had no other living family members. From the information gathered, the committee compiled a “PARISH FAMILY TREE”. They used the symbolism of the Vine and Branches (Jn 15: 5), with pictures of the first church building (1925) and the present

church building (2025) near the roots of the vine. This image is painted on the wall in the social hall of SS. Peter and Paul Church. The leaves on the branches near the “center root and vine” contain the names of each founding family, as well as family members who have remained in this parish. The remaining leaves on the wall contain the names of the priests and pastors who have served this parish, the names of the Benedictine Sisters of Queen of Heaven Monastery and the names of all the families who submitted information. The committee wanted to acknowledge our founders, connect with our present generation, and make room for future members of our parish. The wall is beautiful, and parishioners and visitors are often seen studying the Parish Family Tree!



I think the history committee’s “legacy” met with success!

more photos on next page...

Continued - SS Peter and Paul centennial anniversary celebration



Archbishop William Skurla



Sr. Barbara Pavlik



Sr. Marion Dobos



Ethnic dancers

Here and There . . .

Since October, Sister Lucy Mshami has been staying with our community in Lisle Monday through Friday, as she pursues a nursing degree at Rasmussen University. Lucy is a member of Our Lady of Usambara Sisters in Tanga, Tanzania.

She has been in the U.S. since 2018, first studying at St. Elizabeth University in New Jersey where she earned a BS degree in Foods & Nutrition. She is very interested in how food can act as either medicine or poison.

Lucy added a year of business classes to her education before moving to Wisconsin, where she has been working at St. Camillus Nursing Home in Wauwatosa (Milwaukee) for 2 years. Caregiving led to her decision to study nursing. On weekends she returns to work at St. Camillus.



Still overjoyed over the announcement and the reality that Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost, a native of Illinois, had been chosen to become Pope Leo XIV, Sister Mary Bratrsovsky learned that her cousin, Father Ralph O'Donnell, the tenth child and youngest of the Terry and Janie O'Donnell family, was chosen to become a Bishop.

Given a Bible, a Miter and Crozier in the

presence of Cardinal Christophe Pierre, apostolic nuncio to the United States and representing Pope Leo XIV, Father Ralph O'Donnell of Omaha, Nebraska was ordained and installed as the fifth Bishop of Jefferson City, Missouri on the Feast of Simon and Jude, October 28. Sisters Mary and Christine were most happy to attend.



S. Mary, Bishop Ralph O'Donnell, S. Christine



Doctor Sister Beatrice Kayombo, OSB attended the Catholic Medical Association educational conference in Kansas City, Missouri in early September. Sister is an oncologist in Dar Es Salaam and was sent to gather information and insights on hospice and palliative care, which is rare in the Tanzanian medical field. Her hospital is hoping to apply for a grant to open such a unit.

We were thrilled that Sister Beatrice was able to visit after the conference and reconnect with us here at Sacred Heart.

A more in-depth article was written about Sister Beatrice in our June 2023 LBW. Past issues of the LBW may be found on the Sisters' website: shmlisle.org.

Villa St. Benedict

Villa St. Benedict Celebrates 20 Years of Grace and Community

This year marks a remarkable milestone for Villa St. Benedict in Lisle: 20 years of faith, friendship, and Benedictine hospitality. On Saturday, October 4, 2025, residents, Sisters, staff, families, and friends gathered for a joyful 20th Anniversary Gala, celebrating two decades of living out the Villa's mission of compassion, service, and community.

The evening was filled with gratitude, laughter, and cherished memories. Guests enjoyed music, dancing,



cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, raffles, and fellowship while reflecting on the community's remarkable growth since its founding in 2005, co-sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Benedictine Health System in Minnesota (now Benedictine).



Special tribute was given to the pioneer residents and employees, those who have been with Villa St. Benedict since the very beginning. We were proud to honor six residents and eight dedicated employees whose faith, commitment, and warmth have helped shape Villa St. Benedict into the welcoming home it is today. Their presence reminded all guests of the enduring spirit and dedication that continue to guide the community.



The celebration recognized the founders Sisters of the Sacred Heart, whose vision and devotion laid the foundation for Villa St. Benedict's mission. Their unwavering commitment to hospitality, stewardship, respect, and justice has guided every aspect of community life and continues to inspire all who call the Villa home.



The evening opened with a prayer led by Sister Mary, Prioress, followed by reflections from Joseph Kellogg, Executive Director, who shared the journey of Villa St. Benedict and its impact over the past two decades.



As Villa St. Benedict enters its third decade, the Gala reminded everyone of what makes this community truly special. The evening not only honored the past but also looked forward with optimism and renewed purpose.

A heartfelt thank you to the Sisters, residents, families, sponsors, local vendors, volunteers, and staff who made this milestone celebration possible. Special recognition is extended to the Benedictine Sisters of the Sacred Heart and Benedictine in Minnesota for their steadfast leadership, vision, and support over the past twenty years. Their dedication ensures that the Benedictine mission continues to flourish at Villa St. Benedict for generations to come.



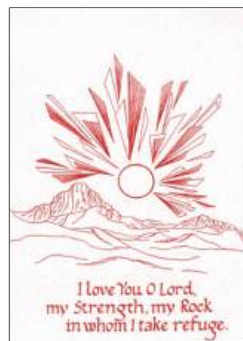


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Prayer Cards are available for all occasions from the Benedictine Sisters



All information is available on our website: www.shmlisle.org
