



Beyond Borders



Helping Hands Medical Mission in El Salvador

PG 3



Responding to
the Immigration
Challenge

Dear Family, Friends, and Benefactors,

As we enter the beautiful season of Advent and spend time remembering the people of the Old Testament awaiting the birth of the Messiah, we too, are invited to enter that experience. Let us wait with anticipation for Christ to be born anew in our hearts and in our actions. We celebrate the birth of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, radical discipleship, hope, and peace during the Christmas season. My prayer for each of you is that your time with family and friends may strengthen your bond of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, radical discipleship, hope and peace so that Christ’s light may shine brighter for each of us during the coming year.

As I reflect on the Christmas story, the struggles of Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt seeking refuge for themselves and the soon to be born infant, and then being uprooted again, and returning to Bethlehem for the census, I can’t help but think of the families fleeing the violence in Central America and coming to the U.S. for refuge. Let me say upfront that I know we, as a country, need to work at formulating a better immigration system, but until we do that, how does scripture inform us of how we are to respond to the stranger, to the poor, to the widow, to the marginalized, to the anawim of our time? The one passage that is most familiar to most of us is Matthew 25:31-46. As we enter this time of reflection and celebration, let us not forget the anawim of our time.

The focus of this issue of our newsletter is immigration and our efforts as a community to do our part in responding to Matthew 25.

Our community has been reaching out to this particular population for at least three years. Many of us, including Sisters Susan, Bernadine, Bernice, Ursula, and myself have been and continue to be involved in addressing the needs of the immigrant and poor. We have collaborated with Catholic Charities, the Interfaith Welcome Coalition, worked at the Dilley Detention Center, have written letters

to our Congress men and women, and written grants to help with some of the material needs that the immigrants need as they make their way to family members in the United States.

This year, several of our Benedictine Communities including Ferdinand, IN, Atchison, KS, & Baltimore, MD have either given donations toward this ministry or are willing to send members to help in this work.

Recently, Sister Ursula was asked by the community to look at another aspect of our ministry at Caridad de Corazón. Caridad de Corazón (Charity of the Heart) was established in 2000. Its mission is to respond to the needs of the poor and disenfranchised living in communities near the Texas/Mexico Border. The Sisters, along with dedicated volunteers, strongly advocate for the poor by promoting health education and providing food, household goods, and medical equipment to those in need. WE have asked Sister Ursula, with the help of some of our Benedictine Sisters from Indiana, to collaborate with IWC, and the Border Patrol in Eagle Pass to shelter the immigrant families as they are processed.

LCWR Region XII, of which Sisters Susan, Sylvia and I are a part, has agreed to respond to the caravan making its way through Mexico. It will probably arrive near Brownsville or McAllen, Texas. It is hoped that we can create our own caravan of religious sisters to go and help Sr. Norma P. welcome the families.

As I continue reflecting on immigration and the catastrophic damage that has been inflicted on so many families with the separation of the children from their parents, I continue to reach for my Bible. The challenge there is clear. We are challenged to take care of the stranger, the widow, the anawim, and the orphan. The anawim of the Old Testament were the poor of every sort: the vulnerable, the marginalized, and socio-economically oppressed, those of lowly status without earthly power. In fact, they depended totally on God for whatever they owned. May our response to them be generous!

May Christ’s peace be with you and your families!

Sister Frances Briseño, OSB

A Mission Beyond Borders

Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB has been a nurse for 45 years. She worked most of those years with the Maverick County Hospital District in Eagle Pass, TX. On October 23rd, she retired from her position as Diabetes Management Specialist. Two days later, she was on a medical mission trip with other professionals to El Salvador. Below are excerpts from her travels:

“The mission trip was fantastic. We had a priest with us so it was great having Mass every day. Our group consisted of physicians, anesthesiologists, pharmacists, nurse practitioners, surgical PAs, nurses, physical therapists, translators, and volunteers who came from different areas of the United States. From day 1 we worked well together. We saw 2,502 patients in the 5 complete and 2 half days that we were there. We did have a few doctors from El Salvador help us.

The folks were very receptive of us. I did some diabetes teaching and the patients were so amazed that I could speak their language. We were reminded every day to see Christ in our patients and it was easy to do this as they were very humble people.

We had a young woman come to the clinic just to have someone to talk to. She had lost her baby and was very despondent when her family went off to their obligations. Father talked to her then several of us were called to pray over her. When she left she looked a lot better. It was as though a load had been taken off her shoulders.

I triaged a patient one day at the clinic and then got to see her in surgery and then transferred her into the recovery room. I was handed a medal to give her. It ended up being St. Benedict. I told her that was a good omen as I was a Benedictine Sister and she just gave me a precious smile.

An older lady came in accompanied by her daughter. She was saying her Diabetes was in control because she felt very good. I gave her the diabetes education and then showed her the glucose level. It was 365mg/dl. Her eyes just lit up and she said, “All this time I thought I was doing so well.” She promised she would take much better care of herself and was very happy to receive 3 months supply of medication as she had not been able to purchase it for 3 months.

It was a time well spent and I would love to do it again next year.”

Sister Ursula is the Director of our Caridad de Corazón ministry in Eagle Pass, TX

Photos courtesy of Helping Hands Medical Mission in El Salvador.

Front Cover - Sister Ursula (far left) with members of the Mission Team.

Above - Sister Ursula and Mission Team member taking patient’s blood pressure

Right - Sister Ursula providing diabetes education to patient.

Since 1996, Helping Hands Medical Missions has served more than 241,000 patients and hosted 153 medical missions in many countries throughout the world, including Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, the Philippines, Brazil, Ghana, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Uganda. For more information visit: www.hhmm.org

Please Join Us
For Our
Christmas Eve Liturgy
December 24th 5 PM
St. Scholastica Monastery



216 W. Highland Dr.
Boerne, Texas
Reception to follow



INTRODUCING OUR NEWEST STAFF



April

The Benedictine Sisters welcomed several new employees during the summer and fall. Right (clockwise):

Norma Samarripa joined the Monastery staff in July as administrative assistant to the Prioress. Her previous office and accounting experience helped make it an easy transition into her position. Norma enjoys reading and scrap-booking and she recently welcomed the arrival of her second grandchild, a baby girl!



Norma

Joseph (Joe) Kramer began in October as part-time Monastery cook. A former restaurant manager, Joe prepares great noon-time meals for the Sisters. In addition to his talents in the kitchen, he enjoys spending time with his family, playing the guitar and singing. He also likes gardening, construction, and sports.

Jaime Pulido joined our grounds & maintenance department in July. Prior to that, he held a position of maintenance supervisor at Peterson Regional Medical Center in Kerrville, TX. He enjoys all aspects of his diverse responsibilities and is considered a jack of all trades in order to keep up with various tasks. Jaime enjoys reading books, business magazines, and updating his own house.



Joe with Sister Michael Brandt, OSB

Carolyn Ruiz, LVN joined the Benedictine Sisters in October. Her focus is tending to the Sisters' medical needs during the evening shift. In her free time, Carolyn enjoys spending time with her family, decorating, and all things related to real estate.

Viviana Lopez began working with us in September as a full-time Home Health Aid. She divides her time helping both Sisters Mechtilde and Germaine. Recently, Viviana married Justin Lopez who is the kitchen manager at the Omega Retreat Center.

April Lopez has been with us since summer as a part-time Home Health Aid. She assists Sister Germaine during the overnight and early mornings. April and her husband just celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. They have five children and are adjusting to having an empty nest.



Jaime



Viviana



Carolyn

WHATEVER GOOD WORK YOU BEGIN TO DO, BEG OF GOD WITH MOST EARNEST PRAYER TO PERFECT IT. ST. BENEDICT



IN APPRECIATION

Special thanks to Polly Robinson who began working in July as part-time assistant in the Office of Mission Advancement. Unfortunately, due to health reasons, she had to leave her position at the end of November.

Polly's many gifts, including photography and social media skills, her compassion for others, and her genuine kind spirit are truly appreciated! We all wish her well!

RECENT GRANTS

Our sincere gratitude to the following Organizations & Foundations for their generous support to our needs:

\$25,000 from the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters in support of immigration in South Texas; for our Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment office needs and for the Interfaith Welcome Coalition to purchase 1575 backpacks for immigrant families in need.

\$20,000 from the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation in support of the Health and Wholeness Center's pool.

\$10,000 - The Perry & Ruby Stevens Charitable Foundation in support of the Health and Wholeness Center's water exercise program; to purchase pool supplies and provide scholarships for participants who are unable to afford membership.

\$2,000 - United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County in support of the Health and Wholeness Center.

\$1,000 - Catholic Life Insurance in support of Monastery medical equipment needs.

Leaving a Legacy

Please consider remembering the Benedictine Sisters in your Legacy Planning. There are many ways that you can make a difference in the lives of the Sisters and those who benefit from our programs and ministries.

Our legal title is Benedictine Sisters (Congregation of Benedictine Sisters), and we are a 501(c)3 charitable organization.

For more info, contact your estate planner, attorney, or Sr. Sylvia Ahr, OSB, Treasurer at 830.816.8504.

Save the Date

Join us for our Annual Feast of St. Benedict Spaghetti Dinner and Silent Auction

March 20, 2019

4 - 7 pm • Benedict Hall

Tickets on Sale in January (MUST be purchased in advance) Call 830.816.8504 for additional information

2018 Annual Giving Update

"Thank you" to all who have generously responded to our annual appeal. To date, over \$26,000 has been received for the health care and basic provision needs of our Sisters. If you have not yet participated in this important campaign, please consider a gift to the Sisters! Donations are still being accepted by mail, on-line, or in person.

2018 Summer Sweepstakes Winners

- \$1,000 Visa Gift Card - Lupe Valdez
- \$ 500 Visa Gift Card - Harold Norman
- \$ 250 Visa Gift Card - David Finger
- \$ 100 Visa Gift Card - Shirley Ahr
- \$ 100 Visa Gift Card - Anne Seidel
- \$ 50 Visa Gift Card - Jerome Ries

Congratulations to ALL our winners and special thanks to ALL who participated in the raffle. You helped raise nearly \$5,000 for the Sisters!

COLLABORATING EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF THE IMMIGRANT

*"For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a
stranger and you welcomed me."*

Matthew 25:35

The **Benedictine Sisters** always seek to do God's work. We have been advocates for the immigrant in Texas and the Southwest for many years. Our **Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment (BCRI)** in San Antonio, under the direction of Sister Susan Mika, OSB, collaborates with the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) of San Antonio. The IWC serves immigrant families, especially women and children, who have been detained at detention centers in south Texas as well as those who have been separated after crossing the border.

BCRI conducts extensive research using print, web, and social media platforms to document and provide up-to-date information regarding multiple aspects of the immigration situation in the region. Data collected and updates include outlining what is impacting the work: proposed legislation, outcomes of ongoing judicial review at the national and local levels, and article summaries that document what is actually happening along the border. BCRI distributes the information to IWC members and alliances. They in turn, use this vital info to continue their piece of the collaborative efforts that make us a unified resource for immigration policies and advocacy.

Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB, director of our **Caridad de Corazón** ministry in Eagle Pass, TX, recently welcomed Religious and lay women from San Antonio to tour a facility in Mexico that houses immigrants seeking asylum in the U.S. She has also connected with the leadership of the IWC to begin talks about how to collaborate efforts along the US/Mexico Border. It's an exciting time as our ministries reach out to others for a collaborative response to the immigration challenge.

Photo below: Migrant House Director, Elizabeth Cardenas Mendoza (2nd from left), leads a tour of the migrant house in Mexico for Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB (3rd from right) and Religious and lay women from San Antonio.

OUR MINISTRIES' WISH LISTS:

CARIDAD

An electric double oven • An enclosed back porch

BCRI

Any donations to help to fund on-going Coalition work and defray ministry expenses.

If you can help, please call 830.816.8504



Soup kitchen in Piedras Negras which is open to migrants as well as those who live in the area.



Sleeping quarters at the migrant house in Mexico



(l-r) Eugene Hileman, treasurer of IWC; Sister Susan Mika, OSB, executive director of Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment; and Susan Baldwin, friend of the Benedictine Sisters.

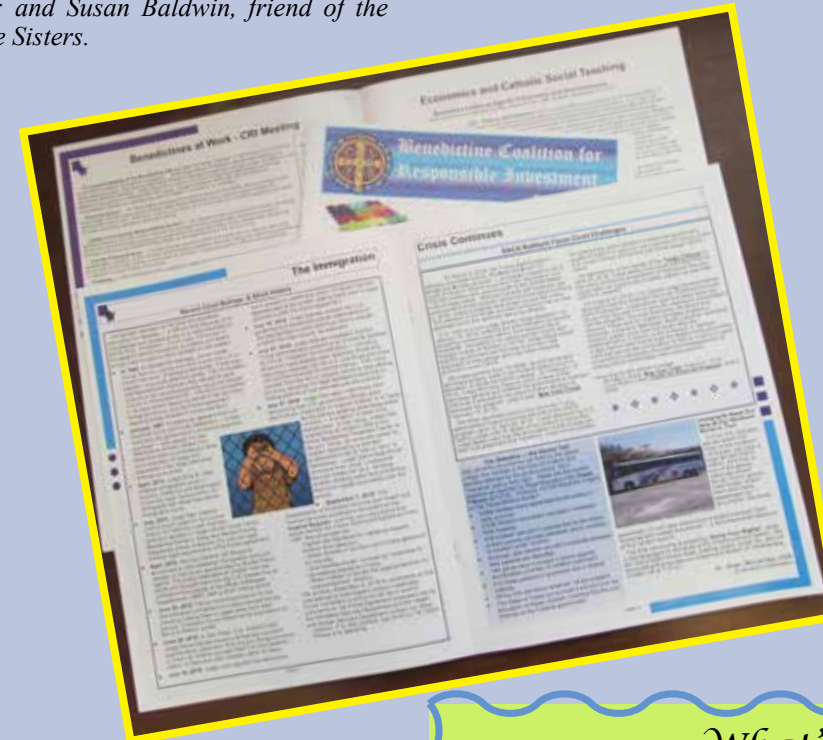
(Left) Thanks to a grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Fund for Sisters, Sister Susan Mika, OSB was able to present a check in the amount of \$18,900 to the Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) of San Antonio at the IWC meeting on August 9, 2018. The funds were used to purchase 1,575 backpacks and supplies for South Texas immigrant families who were in need.



Within the San Antonio-based Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC), groups continue to distribute backpacks with supplies to immigrant families held at the family detention centers in Dilley and Karnes. Last year, 5,000 backpacks were given out. As of October this year, more than 14,500 backpacks have been distributed.

Photo above (courtesy of Jane Fried): IWC Volunteers: David, Mary, Connie, Steve, Bert and Richard helping sort items for backpacks.

Photo left: BCRI publications



JUSTICE

CHARITY

**THE TWO FEET OF SOCIAL ACTION.
LET US WALK TOGETHER IN PEACE & WITH HOPE
TOWARDS THE IMMIGRATION CHALLENGE!**

What's Needed

The Interfaith Welcome Coalition (IWC) Backpack Ministry provides backpacks to distribute to immigrant families as they are released from the family detention centers. A donation of any amount will help this ministry. The backpacks contain toiletries, snacks and items for children.

If you would like to mail a donation, make checks payable to:

University Presbyterian Church
ATTN: IWC Backpack Ministry
300 Bushnell Avenue
San Antonio, TX 78212

On Being Benedictine Oblates by Jan Davis, ObOSB and Bill Howden, ObOSB

Thirty years ago, I read a hot-off-the-press book by Macrina Wiederkehr, A Tree Full of Angels: See the Holy in the Ordinary, and immediately went searching for such an encounter with God. Along the way, God intervened with noticeable signs, but it wasn’t until I began walking the path as a Benedictine Oblate that my soul opened up to the presence of God in the ordinary.

Traveling this journey with Bill since we made our Oblation in 2006 has blessed our marriage as we try to live the Rule in our home, our monastery.

As we read daily from the Rule of Benedict after Lauds (Liturgy of the Hours), it, remarkably, offers a guide for that day, from listening with the ears of our heart, to reverencing things in our home as sacred vessels, to trying over and over to practice humility with each other (oh, that dreaded Chapter 7!). Chapter 5 on Monastic Obedience has prepared us to say yes whenever Sister Antoinette or Sister Frances calls and asks us to do something for the benefit of our Benedictine Sisters and Oblate Community.

I feel, however, that the greatest benefit – for me – is understanding the “Archetype of the Monk” in myself and celebrating it with my spouse as “a way of being” in our marriage. A monk, according to Blessed Simplicity by Raimundo Panikkar, is one who aspires to renounce all that is not necessary, speaks so that every word is a prayer, and, yes, sees the Holy in the Ordinary.

- Jan

The first Benedictine community I came to know was Weston Priory in Vermont. Now, as an Oblate, I often think of a Weston Priory song, inspired by the Prologue to the Rule of Benedict.

*With all good gifts within us,
with the Gospel as our guide,
let us set out together on the path to new life,
to the feast of God’s new earth.*

Benedict calls us to celebrate the gifts we’ve been given. While never ignoring the harsh reality of sin, Benedictine spirituality is marked by joy and optimism: With the gospel as our guide, and the gifts God gives, new life is an open possibility.

*You who seek life, now listen
with the ear of your heart*

Oblates are called to listen, listen deeply, to the moving of the Spirit within, and to the wisdom of others. Being an Oblate reminds me to listen well before making judgments.

*Like scattered grain on the hillside.
you have been kneaded as one bread.*

Our Oblate community is a diverse bunch: Protestants and Catholics, men and women, different ethnicities and occupations.

*Embrace with joy these companions
to go with you on your way*

Over the years, the Sisters and our fellow Oblates have become deeply appreciated companions. Both the Rule and the community are gifts that we treasure.

*With all good gifts within us,
with the Gospel as our guide,
let us set out together on the path to new life,
to the feast of God’s new earth.*¹

- Bill

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About the authors: Jan Davis, D.Min. is a Roman Catholic spiritual director and retreat leader who also teaches Ignatian Spirituality at Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio. Her husband, Bill Howden, Ph.D., is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Married in 2004, they have been Oblates since 2006.

2019 Oblate Schedule

January 6	Threshold into Our Future/ Federation Chapter
February 3	The Rule of Benedict Revisited
March 3	Lenten Reflection
April 7	Essential Elements of the Rule
May 5	Next Steps of Oblate Program
June	No meeting
July 15-21	Retreat and Oblation/Renewal
August	No meeting

Embracing Cultural Diversity - A Journey to the Benedictine Way of Life

By Mary Anne Oehler

Chon Nguyen’s journey to Religious life began in Vietnam. The fifth of seven children, she faithfully attended Catholic Church in her native homeland. In 1995, she, her parents, and four siblings moved to Garland, Texas to begin a new life. Remaining devoted to her faith, Chon became active in two parishes in Garland - Our Lady of Perpetual Help Vietnamese Parish and St. Joseph Catholic Church, often making 2 visits a day to pray and worship. Over a twenty-year period (1995-2015), the call from God became stronger and clearer to her.

Chon’s favorite scripture is from John 21:17 and reflects her deepened calling, “... Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” In late 2015, after listening to the Spirit within and researching Religious communities in Texas, Chon contacted the Benedictine Sisters of Boerne to tell them of her interest in visiting the community. It wasn’t until after the Sisters moved into their new St. Scholastica Monastery in the fall of 2016 that Chon came for a visit.

She has since visited the community three more times, experiencing the Benedictine way of life firsthand. It is a monastic life, guided by the Rule of Benedict and the traditions of Ora et Labora (pray and work). Chon is attracted to this way of life in community. She finds strength in daily prayer and working, especially with the poor and with retreats.



Chon takes time for reflection at the Benedictine Outdoor Chapel



Chon with vocation/formation team member, Sister Mary Agnes Zinni, OSB.

Reflecting on the sisters’ mission and Chon’s discernment, Boerne Prioress, Sister Frances Briseño, OSB noted, "Our Charism, as Benedictines, is to seek God in the communal life and to respond in prayer and ministry. In visiting with Chon, her desire to seek a deeper relationship with God was her reason for choosing our community."

Religious life is revered in Chon’s family. Two of her siblings have already answered calls from God, a brother who is a Priest with the Vietnamese Redemptorist Priests in Houston, and her sister who is a Religious with the Immaculate Conception Sisters in Vietnam. When asked if her family was pleased with her decision to enter Religious life, Chon smiled and said, “My family is very happy that I, too, have chosen a life devoted to God.”

The Benedictine Sisters, who are very open to women inquiring about religious life, have welcomed Chon. Her Vietnamese heritage brings a new culture to their community which currently consists of Hispanic and European decent. With the guidance of experts in the field of inter-cultural diversity, the Sisters’ vocation/formation team will navigate Chon’s formation journey with inclusion that embraces both Vietnamese and western cultures.

Keep in Touch

We would like to hear from you! We are continually updating our database. Please send us your updated information if it is incorrect on the mailing label.

MILESTONES ON THE HILL

Congratulations, Mary Lopez and Karen Herrin, on 30 Years with Us!



Congratulations, Mary (left) and Karen (right)!

It was 1988 when Mary Lopez and Karen Herrin joined the staff of what is now Benedictine Ministries Corporation (BMC). Together, they have sixty years of combined service with the Benedictines. Mary has worked the past thirty years in food service preparing healthy meals, first at the Monastery, then at St. Albert Early Learning Center and at the Omega Retreat Center. She is a Benedictine Oblate and she also helps cook for the Sisters’ annual spaghetti dinner.

Karen began helping at St. Albert’s Early Learning Center thirty years ago as a teacher assistant. She eventually became the school’s bookkeeper. When the school closed, she advanced into the role of Benedictine Ministries’ Business Manager and Human Resource Manager. Currently, she also manages the Omega Retreat Center. Karen assists with special events at BMC and also with the Sisters’ spaghetti dinner.

Congratulations, Angie Webb, on Your Retirement!

Angie Webb (front row center) retired at the end of August after 28 years of devoted service to the Benedictine Sisters. She began working first at the Omega Retreat Center and then served as assistant to the Prioress with both Sisters Mary Agnes Zinni, OSB and Bernadine Reyes, OSB. Angie has been a faithful Oblate for 39 years. She is Sister Ursula Herrera’s sister. Angie is enjoying spending time with her family and writing a book. We owe her a debt of gratitude for her hard work and dedication over the years, and we wish her a peaceful and enjoyable retirement!



Photo right: Back Row (l-r): Sr. Victoria Anne Olivares, OSB, Sr. Bernice Lindsey, OSB, Sr. Frances Briseño, OSB, Sr. Sylvia Ahr, OSB, Sr. Mary Rose Goertz, OSB, Sr. Mary Lou Hernandez, OSB, Sr. Kathleen Higgins, OSB, Sr. Antoinette Van Galen, OSB, and Sr. Susan Mika, OSB; Front Row (l-r): Sr. Ursula Herrera, OSB, Sr. Mary Agnes Zinni, OSB, Angie Webb, Sr. Mechtilde Goertz, OSB, and Sr. Bernadine Reyes, OSB

Best Wishes Chadd Lassitter!



After nearly 26 years of dedicated service to our Benedictine community, Chadd Lassitter (left) will bid us farewell at the end of December. He was first assigned janitorial duties at the Omega Retreat Center in February, 1993. His work ethic and loyalty provided him the opportunity to become Supervisor of Facilities and Grounds in 1998. Chadd began *Ozone Air*, an air-conditioning/heating business, in 2001. For the past 17 years he has worked tirelessly with us during the day overseeing the daily operations of our facilities and land while building a successful business working nights and weekends. Chadd will now devote his time to *Ozone Air*. God bless you, Chadd! We thank you and wish you all the best!

MINISTRIES ON THE HILL

SONGWRITERS AT THE RIDGE



A special “Thank You” to all who supported the Songwriters’ events over the past 10 years! We are especially grateful to singer/songwriters, (left), Billy Montana, Austin Cunningham, Renee’ Coale Willis and Allen Shamblin! This year marks the end of Songwriters’ event. We are grateful for all the memories made over the past decade!

REPAIRS AND UPGRADES AT OMEGA AND HEALTH & WHOLENESS CENTERS

With the help of funds received from many of our faithful donors and grantors, several repairs and upgrades took place at our Boerne Ministries this past year. The Omega Retreat Center was able to replace a 20 year old air-conditioning and heating system in the kitchen, renovate 3 showers in the dorms, install a booster pump in the Omega House for better water flow, and replace 3 Chapel outside doors. The Health and Wholeness Center replaced dressing rooms in the bathhouse, purchased new equipment for the water exercise program, and replaced the pool bathhouse air-conditioner and heating system. The pool will be closed the month of December for additional upgrades including resurfacing the pool and deck areas. Our heartfelt thanks to **ALL** who helped make these repairs and upgrades possible! Below are photos of some of the completed work.



Above (l-r): One of three new Omega Chapel outside doors; new showers in Omega dormitory

Below: (l-r) Poolhouse new dressing rooms and A/C unit



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Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB
Councilor

Mission Statement

We, the Boerne Benedictines, are called to seek
God in community and to respond in ministry
through sharing our spirituality and addressing the
needs of the people we serve, especially the poor.

