

BENEDICTINE VOICE

Benedictine Sisters of Boerne, Texas

Spring 2021



“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity
under the heavens.” Ecclesiastes 3:1

REFLECTION FROM THE prioress



Palm Sunday: Unsettling Times

By Sister Frances Briseño, OSB

The Passion of Christ we hear this Sunday is not unlike the experience of many who have been infected and died of Covid-19 and those that mourn their loss. It is a difficult reality to comprehend. Just yesterday I was healthy and today I am fighting for my life, we hear so many say. It is the same shift in emotion as the Gospel of Matthew at the beginning of the Palm Sunday liturgy. There are shouts of “Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest.” The crowd is full of joy and seconds later they say, “Crucify him, crucify him.” Very unsettling and yet very real.

The human condition, often, catches us off guard. Michelle Franci-Donnay, talks about how unsettling the whole reality must have been for those who were closest to Jesus. “Seeing signs that suggested things were not as they had been, or should be, but not knowing quite what they meant and how it would all come out.” Those with the virus and their families are in the midst of that same reality. Families that love their grandparents, parents, children cannot comfort them. They cannot walk closely with them as they suffer. They can’t say good-bye. They are left feeling empty and cold. The unknown is maddening! The struggle, the betrayal, the suffering, and the death of Christ was intense last year and will be more intense this year. I think all of us will celebrate the Triduum with a sense of caution. We will celebrate the Triduum with eyes wide open and ears amplified hoping we don’t miss the grace of this moment. Hoping we are nearing the end of this liminal time.

Donnay continues with this question. “Can I listen to the passion this year, truly present to its reality without mentally racing ahead to the ending?” All of us affected by the virus, but especially the patients, families, doctors, nurses, first responders, cannot race to the end because we don’t know where the end is. There are so many uncertainties.

As we unite our voices and pray for and with those who suffer, let us not forget that Jesus’ sorrow did not end in the grave and neither will ours! The grief will be lifted, and joy will return. We will dance and sing once more! New life will come! The memory of this Easter, however, will live far beyond us. And just as the youngest child in the Jewish household asks: Why is this night different than all other nights? We will ask, Why was this Easter different than all other Easters?

Sister Frances Briseño continues to recover after suffering a stroke in early March. The Benedictine Sisters wish to thank everyone who has reached out to them with expressions of love, concern, prayers, and acts of kindness for Sister Frances.

“For I know well the plans I have in mind for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.” Jeremiah 29:11



PRAYERS FOR SISTER FRANCES

Prayer Service Held for Sister Frances Briseño, OSB

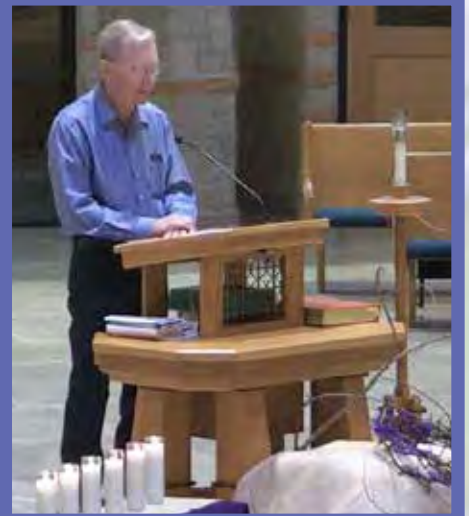
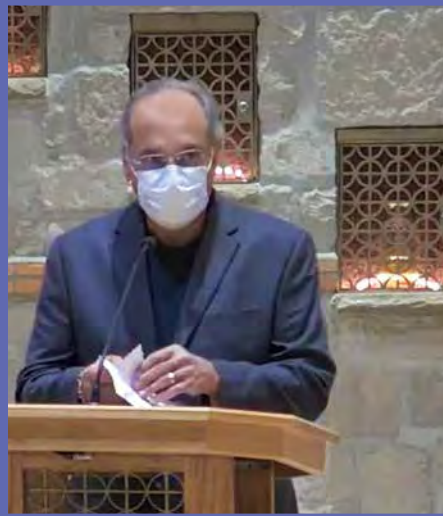
Long-time friends of Sister Frances organized a special prayer service of health and recovery for her on Sunday, March 7th at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in San Antonio. The service was live streamed for those who were unable to attend.

Rose Mary Lopez, former Director of ACTS Spiritual Companion Program in San Antonio, led the service of song, music, speakers, and prayer. Sister Frances' Palm Sunday reflection had been sent to the ACTS community

earlier in the week. It was read during the service. The Benedictine Sisters thought it would be appropriate to include in this issue of Benedictine Voice.

The Sisters are deeply grateful to all who helped organize the prayer service, to everyone who participated in the service, and to those who attended both in person and virtually.

Please continue to pray for Sister Frances' full recovery.



(l-r) Larry Lopez read the Palm Sunday Reflection; Musician, David Kauffman and Rose Mary Lopez prayed in silence while Sister Sylvia Ahr, OSB lit a candle; and Fr. Jim Henke offered words of wisdom and a closing prayer at the service.



Friends and family gathered at St. Frances of Assisi Catholic Church in San Antonio to pray for Sister Frances.

Benedictines Part of Important South Texas History

When our Sisters left Cuba and arrived in Texas in 1919, they taught at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Las Gallinas. The school was closed not long after, and the church was destroyed by fire in 1983. The local civic community never forgot the Sisters, nor the importance and impact of the school and the church. A historical marker was placed on the site where the school and church once stood by the Atascosa County Historical Commission on October 17, 2020. Our Sisters were invited to take part in the event and several attended. Sr. Frances Briseño, OSB, Prioress, delivered the opening prayer.



Sisters who attended the event included (l-r) - Frances Briseño, OSB, Kathleen Higgins, OSB, Bernadine Reyes, OSB, Ursula Herrera, OSB, Chon Nguyen, OSB, Susan Mika, OSB, Sylvia Ahr, OSB, and Victoria Anne Olivares, OSB.

Sisters Receive COVID-19 Vaccines

The Sisters were able to receive their first COVID-19 vaccine in San Antonio on January 14. They braved the cold weather on February 11 to receive their second dose, just before the big freeze hit Texas!

Pictured below (l-r) Sister Antoinette Van Galen, OSB after getting her first vaccine; Sister Kathleen Higgins, OSB with sign was ready to go; and Sister Mary Louise Hernandez, OSB and the Sisters' Health Care Coordinator and driver, Carolyn Ruiz, LVN, waited for others before heading to San Antonio for the second dose.



Sister Chon Nguyen, OSB, Makes First Profession

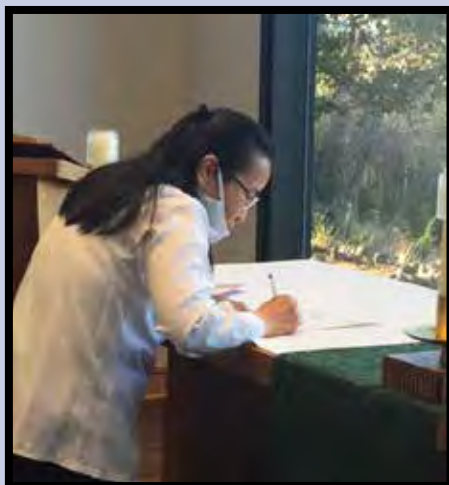
Surrounded by her Benedictine Community, Sister Chon Nguyen, OSB made her first Profession on Saturday, January 16, 2021. Sister Bernadine Reyes, OSB, member of the Formation Team and Sister Chon's Novice Director, worked closely with Sister Chon during the past year and a half. "It has been a grace-filled experience being with Sister Chon on her journey," commented Sister Bernadine. "We, as Community, continue to be stretched as we grow in our understanding of the Vietnamese culture."

Sister Chon was elated after the ceremony. She said, "When I made my first Profession, I joyfully gave my life to God. I am confident God has called me right here, right now to love and to serve as a Benedictine Sister." Sister Chon has begun classes to become a Certified Nursing Assistant. She also continues with ESL classes.

Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB is now Sister Chon's scholastic director.



Due to the pandemic, the Profession Ceremony was held just for the community.



(l-r) Sister Bernadine Reyes, OSB, Novice Director, read from the Rule of Benedict before presenting Sister Chon to the Prioress and community; Sister Chon Nguyen, OSB, signed her name to her vows; and Sister Frances Briseño, OSB - Prioress, presented Sister Chon with a Benedictine Cross pendant.

Leaving a Legacy Gift

Fifty-two weeks a year women religious stand with the poor and immigrants, teach children, fight injustice, heal the sick, share spirituality, empower women, defend the planet, promote peace, create community, offer hope... (Catholicsistersweek.org)

Since our arrival in Texas in 1919, we have boldly initiated ministries in the areas of education, healthcare, spirituality and hospitality, peace and justice, and pastoral care.

Have our ministries touched your life in some way?

If so, would you consider leaving a Legacy Gift to us?

We will honor your priorities and wishes for any planned giving you choose to establish.

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.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Reaching and Teaching Across the Miles By Christine Zinni, Ph.D.

During the past two years, I have been teaching Food and Culture and Indigenous Studies classes at SUNY (State University of New York) Brockport College in upstate New York. Students' learning has been greatly enhanced by guest lectures and question and answer sessions with Sister Susan Mika, OSB (pictured below). Initially arranged as a series of video conferences, in collaboration with Donna Peterson-Spence, Director of our college's Migrant Education Program, we have been using a Zoom type platform for our online meetings with Sister Susan since the pandemic began. Through these coordinated means, the sessions were able to reach over 200 students in western New York - raising awareness of the Benedictine Sisters of Boerne's work on behalf of immigrants and asylum seekers and advocacy for human rights, social and environmental justice, and corporate responsibility.



Students were eager to learn about Sister Susan's work with the Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment (BCRI) and Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). She showed leadership on the successful national campaigns that affected McDonald's decision to eliminate the sale of chicken products produced with animals fed antibiotics that we humans use, and the implementation of safety measures and rights for essential workers.

Students were interested in hearing about migration issues in the southwest and were very moved by Sister Susan's

description of the children held at the detention center in Dilley, TX. They were also touched by Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB's longstanding ministry work through Caridad de Corazón that assists children and needy families along the Texas-Mexico border.

These sessions help students develop appreciation for the everyday struggles of farm workers laboring in the bountiful fruit orchards, dairy farms, and vast fields of beans, onions, and cabbage that grow outside our college.



Christine, center, with students at a local dairy farm in upstate NY.

Students also gain insight into the difficulties the migrants and asylum seekers must have encountered crossing the Mexican border to find work in New York State.

The end result was that the dialogues with Sister Susan not only raised students' awareness of the importance of the Benedictine Sisters' ministries and work, but gave students hope that one's voice, efforts, and advocacy can make a difference in the world. As Sister Susan often said, "Don't give up, just keep at it!" It was clear to me as a teacher, that this message not only planted seeds of empathy, compassion, and moral responsibility, but helped students envision positive steps toward good citizenship and work toward the common good in the 21st century.

Christine Zinni is an Adjunct Lecturer at SUNY Brockport College in Brockport, NY. She holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in American Studies from State University of New York at Buffalo. Christine is Sister Mary Agnes Zinni, OSB's niece.

Sister Susan Mika, OSB is Director of Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment and collaborates with the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility in San Antonio, TX.

What Students Had to Say

"Sister Susan Mika has opened my eyes to issues I never knew of. Her life's work proves that change can become reality.

Yes it may take time but its always possible. Hearing of her dedication and knowledge is truly awe inspiring and a role model. It makes me wonder what I can do." *Katlin Adams*

"The stories and pictures had a very strong emotional charge for me as a Latinx/Indigenous person and feeling like my communities were under a very powerful attack. Sister Susan's advocacy work inspired me and gave me a glimpse of how internally gratifying it is to create change in areas where others see it as impossible. It is easy for students of my age to be intimidated and feel helpless and as if there are no options. The advice she shared with us, is that we, too, are capable of creating change and that her type of work is equally as accessible to us as young people, and maybe even more so." *Emily Nunez*

"Sister Susan's advocacy work is inspirational. She and the BCRI and ICCR are the reasons for many important changes that will positively impact the future like wage increases. As someone who lives and works in the city of Rochester, I have seen, first hand, the hindrance multi-generational trauma cycles and poverty has on the growth and development of communities." *Riley Frantzen*

Helping Immigrants During Texas Winter Storms

By Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB, Director of Caridad de Corazón - Eagle Pass, Texas

Oh my goodness! Never did I believe we would get the terrible storm that came in on February 14, 2021. To make matters worse, I was asked to help house immigrants. I was unable to do so because a mission group was planning to stay at the Sisters' Caridad Mission House, but I volunteered to help at the shelter with whatever was needed. I was assigned to the kitchen. What a challenge! There was very little food available and definitely not enough for the 150 immigrants that were released by border patrol agents. But as always, God anticipates our needs. I had just received a donation two days before and off I went to the grocery store to stock up on food. Bessy and I started cooking and didn't stop until 10:00 pm. When the power went off on Monday, I brought in my camping stove but the little tanks were no match for the amount of cooking that needed to be done. We were unable to find the propane tanks anywhere so we had to resort to cooking outdoors on the grill. The hot dogs were a big hit!

Everyone had several layers of clothing on to stay warm. With all the folks at the center, it was actually comfortable so I stayed there until it was time to go home to the Mission House, pray, and go to sleep. There was neither water nor power at home. I just got up, took a quick sponge bath, dressed warmly and went back to the Center.

A generator was finally brought in on Tuesday but we were not able to use it until Wednesday. We were in the middle of cooking supper when the guys came in to say they needed to turn it off for a "little while" in order to connect the building to the generator.



Sister Ursula Herrera, OSB, cared for an infant while the child's parents ate a hot meal. (courtesy photo)



Volunteers at the shelter in Eagle Pass, Texas prepared meals for the newly released immigrants during power outages. (courtesy photo)

Two hours later, the building was not connected but they allowed us to finish cooking supper. That was a late supper with a bunch of very hungry people.

On Thursday we had a slow soft snow all day. We finally got power around noon at the shelter. We were really never without water so that was a blessing. On Thursday, I finally had power at home as well. It felt great to sit in front of the electric fireplace and enjoy the warmth.

Saturday morning I was finally able to shower before going to work. I realized how the immigrants feel when they haven't had a shower for weeks while on their travels. The water was very soothing.

Also on Saturday, we finally started receiving donations. Folks came out of the woodwork with donations of food, milk, and clothing. Our immigrants were finally able to make arrangements to continue their journey. They were anxious to leave, never realizing that what happened is not our usual weather. They didn't realize that food had to be rationed because our grocery stores were empty. I am very thankful to God for helping us make it through the difficult week with this group. Hopefully, God will bless them abundantly as they reach their destinations.

BOERNE MINISTRIES - UPDATES

Health and Wholeness Center Pool Open With Restrictions

The seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic posed many challenges for all of us. The Health and Wholeness Center (HWC), a program for individuals ages fifty and older, closed for several months in 2020. A team of devoted volunteers remained resilient and helped Sister Bernadine Reyes, OSB, carefully plan for the Center's safe reopening in October. Volunteers re-registered 125 members for water exercise classes. Weekly class sizes are limited and participants follow strict guidelines in place for the safety and well-being of all. For more information on the water exercise program please call 830-816-8470.

(right) Members of the HWC practice social distancing during water exercise class.



Bethany - A Space for Individual Day Retreats “Come Away and Rest Awhile”



Though Omega Retreat Center remains closed, **Bethany**, a space dedicated for individual day retreats, will open this spring. Director of Ministries, Sister Bernadine Reyes, OSB, commented on the naming of this new space, "It seemed to me that Bethany was such a welcoming place for Jesus, we wanted to create a welcoming place where guests could come for a hermitage day or day of rest."

Reservations are now being accepted for day use of Bethany. Please call 830.816.8470 for reservations or for more information.

Sisters' Attic Thrift Store - We're Open

COVID-19 restrictions caused us to close our Sisters' Attic Thrift Store for three months last year. In July, we were able to safely re-open with the following guidelines in place: masks are required, temperature checks are required before entering, and occupancy is limited.

Sisters' Attic is the perfect place to find a variety of gently used clothing, furniture, housewares, books, specialty items, and household collectibles at reasonable prices.

We are open Tue. - Sat. from 10 am - 4 pm. Donations accepted 10 am - 2 pm (appointment preferred - call 830-249-0020).

Your support of Sisters' Attic, whether shopping and/or donating, benefits our Boerne Ministries.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Winter Storms, the Polar Vortex, and Climate Change



In mid-February, winter storms Uri and Viola packed a devastating one-two punch to a good portion of the United States. Millions in Texas lost power and/or water, some for days. Many lost their lives. Rolling power outages were common while state officials tried to figure out what went wrong. Several news sources reported the Texas power grid was “four minutes 37 seconds away from a total collapse.” If that would have happened, it could have been down for months - the whole week was a catastrophic event.

Thankfully the Benedictine Sisters were safe at St. Scholastica Monastery. The heat and water stayed on and there were enough supplies during the epic snow, then ice, then snow storms.



Several pipes did break in other buildings on the property. Most have been repaired. “Compared to so many others, we were blessed,” commented Sister Sylvia Ahr, OSB, Sub-Prioress. “We prayed constantly for the safety and well-being of all people who were affected by the winter weather. We continue prayers as people try to rebuild from the devastation incurred.”



Conversations about why this happened point to the polar vortex and climate change. Sister Susan explained, “The polar vortex normally is in its orbit around the Arctic. The Arctic is melting at an alarming rate. It comes out of that orbit and goes elsewhere. This time, it came all the way to the bottom of Texas. Sometimes, it sweeps to the North or down the middle of the U.S. but not this far down. With the changing climate, we don’t know how this will continue to affect regions, but we know it will. Climate change means warming events and freezing events to degrees that we have not experienced before in a consistent manner.”

What can we do to slow down the climate change? If you haven’t already begun, start by simply consuming less and wasting less. Use energy wisely and reduce water waste. With a global population of roughly 7.8 billion reported in 2020, we don’t even have time to waste.

Photos taken on the “Hill” during and after the big snow and ice storms by Sisters Bernadine Reyes, OSB (top left - bottom left) and Sylvia Ahr, OSB, (bottom center of Sister Chon Nguyen, OSB, and bottom right.)



OTHER HAPPENINGS

2021 Catholic Sisters Week

The theme for this year's Catholic Sisters Week (March 8-14) was Celebrating Traditions - Changing the World. It was the perfect time to premier, "Benedictine Values - Modern Monasticism", a video that was produced by a group of communicators from Benedictine women's monasteries around the country. The video highlights 10 Benedictine values and includes photographs provided by 21 communities, including the Benedictines of Boerne. It is available for viewing on the web at <https://bit.ly/3tocAve>

Sisters who enjoyed a presentation of the video at the Monastery were (seated l-r) Antoinette Van Galen, OSB, Mary Agnes Zinni, OSB, and Victoria Anne Olivares, OSB. (standing l-r) Mary Louise Hernandez, OSB, Bernadine Reyes, OSB, Sylvia Ahr, OSB, and Kathleen Higgins, OSB.

We Love Our Sisters!



Get Social With Us!

Want to keep up with the Benedictine Sisters? Please join our email list. We introduced a monthly e-news letter, "Reflections from the Hill", in October. If you would like to receive these occasional updates, please send your email address to:

info@boernebenedictines.org or sign up on our website or scan QR code below.

Find us on Facebook and Instagram, too!

We never share your information.



Thank You St. Peter's

When the Benedictine Sisters decided to cancel this year's Feast of St. Benedict Spaghetti Dinner fundraiser, due to COVID-19 concerns, the Knights of Columbus - Council #10940 and the Catholic Daughters of America - Court #2690 from St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church stepped up to help. These wonderful men and women organized a meatless spaghetti dinner (drive through) that was held at the church on Friday, March 5th. All proceeds were for the Sisters!

The Sisters wish to thank the Knights and the Daughters for this special blessing. We share our heartfelt gratitude to Fr. Norman Ermis and all who supported this event.



Mission Statement

We 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.

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Blessings

The Benedictine Sisters are deeply humbled by the tremendous support they received in 2020. Despite having to cancel last year's Spaghetti Dinner and the None's Ball, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, donations still came because of the generosity and loving hearts of so many of you!

The Sisters wish to thank you for your blessings throughout the year and for the response received from our Annual Giving Campaign request. May God bless you and your loved ones in abundance!

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