

BENEDICTINE VOICE

Benedictine Sisters of Boerne, Texas

Fall/Winter 2024

A photograph of a vibrant red cardinal perched on a dark, bare branch. The background is a soft-focus winter scene with snow-covered trees and falling snowflakes, creating a serene and cold atmosphere.

*“To everything
there is a season...”
Ecclesiastes 3:1*

REFLECTION FROM THE prioress

Seasons of Change



We see the seasons change every year and most people have a favorite season. Fall has a special place in my heart. I am not sure why. Many parts of south Texas do not display the beautiful foliage change that happens in other parts of the country. But there

is something about letting go, and nature knows when to let go and retreat into itself for a while.

In life there are seasons as well, reminding us that change is all around. We have experienced some significant transitions over the past few months. In mid-August, Sister Mary Louise (Mary Lou) Hernandez passed into her eternal season with God at the age of 97. We were blessed to have accompanied her and her family on her journey home. Our community continues forward, yet we miss her ever joyful presence.

In late August, we announced our Omega Retreat Center would enter its season of closure at the end of June 2025. This was a very difficult but necessary decision for us.

One of our faithful Co-ministers, Mary Anne Oehler, retired at the end of October after 18 years of heading our Office of Mission Advancement. The new season for her will be one of much deserved rest and time for self and family. We will miss her and wish her only the best.

A Prayer for all Seasons

Loving God, we lift up, in prayer, those suffering from the impacts of war, natural disasters, illness, oppression, poverty, and violence. Grant them strength in their struggles and peace in their hearts.

May we be inspired to act with kindness and support, working together towards a world of compassion and unity. And may we be more conscious of caring for our common home, the magnificent earth you created.

We ask this through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

We enter another new season with Hailey Beaton, who has begun her journey with us as Communications Coordinator in the Office of Communications. Her youthful spirit and gifts are blessings to us and to our ministries. This is her inaugural communication piece as assistant editor. We welcome her and wish her well.

As we enter the holiday season, we take the opportunity to be grateful for the many donors, long-term and new, who supported us this past year. We forever hold them in prayer.

On behalf of the Sisters, we wish all our readers a blessed Advent, a Merry Christmas, and a happy, healthy New Year. May your celebrations be joyful and safe, and may your seasons of life come gently and bring you to growth and peace.

Sister Bernadine

Sister Bernadine Reyes, OSB
Prioress





Blessed To Be A Benedictine Oblate

By Susan Damon, ObOSB, Communications Associate

I first heard about the Benedictine Oblate program five years ago when I was hired by the Benedictine Sisters for the position of Development Associate for the Office of Mission Advancement. I was eager to learn more about Benedictine spirituality and the Sisters' unique perspectives on the values of Balance, Care of the Earth, Community, Hospitality, Listening, Peace, and Prayer. I wanted to better understand The Rule of Benedict, which guides their daily lives, and has guided Benedictine communities for nearly 1500 years!

During the pandemic I began Oblate Initial Formation classes. Our group met virtually under those extraordinary circumstances. I looked forward to the reading assignments, monthly presentations, and discussions. I always felt enriched by the meetings, and still do.

I became an Oblate in May of 2022 and learning continues. There are monthly meetings, September thru May, for Oblates (in-person at the Monastery and virtual via Zoom), as well as Initial Formation in-person classes for prospective Oblates. I have worked closely with the Oblate Leadership Team, helping with Zoom meetings and twice presenting on Hospitality (one of my favorite values).

The classes wrap up in the spring and, after a time of discernment, there is an opportunity to make a commitment to become an Oblate (for Initial Formation candidates) or to renew one's commitment as an Oblate of St. Scholastica Monastery during an Oblation ceremony in May.

In this season of my life, I feel blessed to be a Benedictine Oblate, a lay associate of this beloved monastic community, while now working part-time with the Sisters. (For more information about the Oblate Program visit <https://boernebenedictines.org/oblates/>.)

Above photo (provided): Bill Howden, ObOSB, presents at the September 2024 Oblate Meeting.



Meet Our New Communications Coordinator

Hailey Beaton (left) joined the Office of Mission Advancement in early October as the new Communications Coordinator.

Hailey, a Boerne native, holds a Communications degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio. She is enjoying her new position and looks forward to expanding her creative skills set.

Hailey previously served with another nonprofit and is passionate about contributing her talent to meaningful causes that align with her values of service and community impact. Among her favorite hobbies are hiking and dancing. Welcome aboard Hailey!



Día de los Muertos A Special Tradition

by Gloria Villanueva, ObOSB,
Communications Assistant

Left: Members of the Health & Wholeness Center learn from Gloria (far right) about the holiday tradition.

Día de los Muertos is a Celebration of Life, the lives of those who have gone before us. It is a time to remember the stories they left us and intertwine our own stories with theirs.

Those stories begin to come alive in the preparation of altars (ofrendas) where the papel picado (cut out paper) is placed to allow the souls to enter into the familiar.

The altar is prepared on October 31st when the souls of the Angelitos, the children, return on Hallows Eve/All Saints Eve. Twenty-four hours later, on November 1st - All Saints Day, when the children leave, the adult souls arrive. November 2nd is celebrated for All the Souls in Purgatory.

On the altars, we place items to draw the souls to the altar and help them to cross over for their visitation.

These may include food and drink they enjoyed: a glass of water to quench their thirst from a long journey, salt in the shape of a cross also to quench their thirst and help purify them, and Pan de Muertos (bread), a soft sweet bread, dusted with sugar designed with circles and limbs to resemble the shape of a skull and crossbones.

Gravesites are visited and decorated with flowers (marigolds, calla lilies, cockscomb) and ribbons of bright colors and many other things like on our altars. The music, the chatter, the laughter and the tears are of joy as our loved ones' lives are remembered and celebrated.

¡La Fiesta Mas Viva de Todas! (The Liveliest Celebration of All!)

Experiencing the RCRI National Conference

by Melynda Weilbacher, Director of Operations

The Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI) conference is an annual gathering for members of religious institutes to discuss pressing issues in religious life and ministry. This year's event in Orlando, Florida, was a rich experience for first-time attendees like me.

With 41 diverse sessions, the conference covered topics from nonprofit accounting to human resources, emphasizing a holistic approach to nurturing mind, body, and soul. Keynote Speaker Sister Teresa Maya, CCVI, inspired unity and purpose with her address on the People of God walking in a Synodal Path.

Despite challenging weather, the conference remained vibrant, fostering connections among participants who eagerly exchanged ideas and contact information for future collaboration.

More than just an educational event, the RCRI conference offered a journey of personal and professional growth, equipping attendees with valuable insights for their service

and ministry. As it concluded, the sense of community and shared purpose promised ongoing collaboration and support, highlighting the power of gathering in faith and service.



Above: (L-R) Sister Susan Mika, OSB, Keynote Speaker, Sister Teresa Maya, CCVI, and Melynda Weilbacher at the RCRI Conference (photo provided)



2024 Summer Drawing Winners

THANK YOU to all who participated in our summer drawing that raised nearly **\$10,000** for the Sisters' needs!
Congratulations to the following winners:

GRAND	(2) \$500 Visa Gift Cards: Deborah Franke	PRIZE
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❤️	\$100 Amazon Gift Card: Peggy Dean	❤️
❤️	\$50 Amazon Gift Card: Darla Wolfe	❤️

Leaving a Legacy

Please consider remembering the Benedictine Sisters in your Legacy Planning. We will honor your wishes for any planned giving you choose to establish.

There are opportunities to support the general needs of the Sisters and/or our ministries.

Our legal title is Benedictine Sisters (Congregation of Benedictine Sisters).

We are a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. For more info, contact your Estate planner, attorney, or Sister Sylvia Ahr, OSB, Treasurer, at 830.816.8504.

Save the Date!

Feast of St. Benedict Spaghetti Dinner and Raffle



**Thursday,
March 20, 2025
5-7pm**

**Cana Ballroom
St. Peter the Apostle
Catholic Church -
Boerne**

Visit our website in January for more info!
boernebenedictines.org

Tickets \$20
On sale in January



Benedictine Voice
is designed for our Benedictine Family,
Friends, & Benefactors.

Editor: Mary Anne Oehler
Assistant Editor: Hailey Beaton

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Sister Michael Brandt, OSB and Susan Damon
for their gifts of time & wisdom

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The Significance of the Red Cardinal



The red cardinal on the front cover aligns perfectly with our newsletter theme, “To everything there is a season.” Cardinals are present in all seasons and to many, symbolize gratitude, renewal, strength, and new beginnings. They are often viewed as spiritual messengers or symbols of loved ones who have passed, offering comfort and connection. And we can’t forget, this beautiful bird and its heavenly song are reminders of hope and joy, especially during the holiday season.

SEASONS OF TRANSITION



Sister Mary Louise “Mary Lou” Hernandez, OSB

May 1, 1927 - August 15, 2024

Perpetual Profession - August 6, 1983



Our Sister Mary Louise “Mary Lou” Hernandez, OSB, was born in San Antonio, TX to Juan Manuel Flores and Maria de los Angeles Rivas Garcia de Flores. She had an older sister and younger brother. Her paternal grandparents had seventeen children. This large, extended family was like its own community, which helped Sister Mary Lou easily relate to community life with the Sisters.

Sister started her career in bookkeeping at the very young age of nine when she kept a simple set of books at her aunt’s grocery store. After graduating from High School, she married and lived in San Diego, CA. She and her son, Richard, returned to San Antonio in the early 1950s. Richard attended Sacred Heart School and was taught by the Benedictine Sisters. This was where Sister Mary Lou got to know the Sisters.

Sister Mary Lou studied Finance and Accounting at the University of Texas at San Antonio. She worked many years in San Antonio at Bexar Meat Company and then Apache Meat Company before entering the Benedictine community in 1975.

Sister served in many ministries during her Religious Life including Bookkeeping, Maintaining the Archives, and Revenue Sharing. She also served as a Member of the Housing Authority for the City of Boerne for nearly 30 years and was a Commissioner from 2007-2009. Sister Mary Lou loved children and cared for many. She especially enjoyed her time with the children who resided at the former Children’s Inn, which was located on the grounds of the Benedictine Sisters. Sister Mary Lou will be remembered for her joy and compassion, her wonderful sense of humor, her love for life, and for being helpful to all.

At Sister Mary Lou’s long-standing request, her body was donated to the University of Texas’ Health Science Center in San Antonio for the advancement of science and research.

Omega Retreat Center to Close

In late August, we announced our Omega Retreat Center would be closing at the end of June 2025. This decision was not an easy one. Omega has been an oasis for retreat groups and individuals seeking quiet space and time away from the busyness of life since 1982. As you know, many have called it “sacred ground”. The first ACTS Retreat was held at Omega in 1987.

The retreat center closed when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived in Boerne in the spring of 2020. It took a long time to resume operations, and even now, the center does not operate at full capacity. The loss of revenue has created a hardship. In addition, the high cost of maintaining the retreat facilities has become a financial burden for us. Despite the tremendous efforts of our dedicated staff, we can no longer sustain Omega. We are grateful we could provide space for spiritual renewal for so many over the past 42 years.



Always striving to be good stewards of our resources, we will continue to operate our other Boerne ministries, the Health and Wholeness Center and Sisters’ Attic Thrift Store, as well as our Caridad de Corazón border ministry in Eagle Pass and Corporate Responsibility ministry in San Antonio.



Groundbreaking News!

On September 13th, several Benedictine Sisters attended the groundbreaking ceremony of St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School in Boerne.

The 8-acre land tract, where the new school will be built, was formerly owned by the Sisters. It was sold last fall to Clarence and Tina Kahlig, of the Kahlig Auto Group in San Antonio. The Kahligs, benefactors of St. Peter the Apostle Catholic Church, gifted the land to the church for the purpose of building the new school.

“We are grateful for the opportunity to partner with Clarence, Tina, and St. Peters,” said Sister Bernadine Reyes, OSB. “Our Sisters taught for many years in Catholic Schools. It will be wonderful having a Catholic School so close to our grounds.” The new school, a \$28 million project, will house PreK-8th grade students and is expected to open in September 2025. *(above photo provided)*

Grateful for the Epic Journey

I recently transitioned into the Season of Retirement. I am deeply grateful to the Benedictine Sisters for the opportunity to have worked with them for the past 18 years as Director of Mission Advancement. We have celebrated many milestones and overcome many challenges. My time with the Sisters will remain close to my heart. It has been an epic journey.

My gratitude extends to so many wonderful people I have worked with and met over the years: Co-ministers - past and present, caregivers, Oblates, collaborators, volunteers, vendors and alumni, family, friends, and benefactors of the Sisters. Thank you for your unwavering support to the Boerne Benedictines. Because of your faithful walk with them, these Spirit-filled women have been able to build an incredible legacy, serving God's people in so many ways. I trust you will continue to embrace them and their ministries with your loving kindness and generosity for years to come.

This next chapter of my life will be a time to let go of things past and to slow down. I look forward to spending quality time with my husband and taking personal time for renewal. I await, with great hope, the plans God has for the future. Wishing you peace, joy, and good zeal ~

Mary Anne Oehler



Above seated l-r: Sisters Antoinette Van Galen, Mary Agnes Zinni, Ursula Herrera, and Victoria Anne Olivares. Standing l-r: Sisters Bernice Lindsey, Michael Brandt, and Frances Briseno, Mary Anne Oehler, Sisters Bernadine Reyes, Kathleen Higgins, Sylvia Ahr, and Susan Mika.

A SEASON TO HONOR OUR DONORS

We are grateful to the following donors who gave a gift in support of the Boerne Benedictine Sisters and/or our ministries during our last fiscal year, July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024. Names reflected below are gifts processed through our Office of Mission Advancement and used solely for the Benedictine Sisters and/or our ministries. Every effort has been made to keep our list accurate. If your name was overlooked or misprinted, please accept our apology and contact us at 830.816.8504 or gifts@boernebenedictines.org

Please note + indicates a dear donor who has passed away.

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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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*Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!
May this joyful season be filled with love,
peace, and the blessings of our Savior,
guiding you into a year of hope
and new beginnings.*

