



G



Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica

Gyrovagi

Gyrovagi: An occasional newsletter from the president of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica

Spring 2024

Inside this issue:

Idea from Pittsburgh	1
President's column	2-3
Death of Sisters	4-5
Notes from the Archivist	6-8
President's Travel	8
CIB Update	9-10
CLAR Manifest of Care	11
Congregation Council Meeting	12-15
55 and Under	16-17
Radical Hospitality	18-23
YEBW in Germany	24-25
2022-2026 Direction Statement	26-27
Direction Stmts 2022	27
Member Statistics	28-29



S. Lynn McKenzie, OSB
Congregation President

A Creative Idea from Pittsburgh

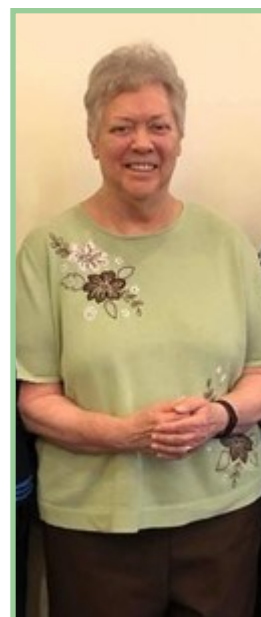
What do you do when your 92 year old human resource Sister dies and you need to hire four persons for your health care wing? Number One, in desperation, you reach out to the other 14 communities in your diocese with a plea for help. Number Two, you respond to the Felician Sisters who offer the assistance of their HR person. That's all it took, and in one month we were fully staffed again.



We became part of a pilot program sponsored by LCWR and coordinated by the Felicians. Along with four other "smaller" communities...we're 32, they coordinated every step of the hiring process, from refining our job descriptions, to advertising, to making appointments for interviews. Once we conducted the interviews and decided on who to hire, the Felicians also took care of the various clearances and drug testing and other required paperwork.

The Felician staff was extremely experienced, professional and helpful every step of the way, and while we have a somewhat informal relationship with them, we will continue to engage them whenever we have a hiring need.

Karen Brink, Prioress, Benedictine Sisters of Pittsburgh



HOPE and Some Poetry President's column

HOPE . . . a good topic for spring, for Easter, for life! We all need hope in our lives, to keep us from despair. In resurrection we hope.

As I was thinking of HOPE, I recalled the old John Foley, SJ hymn, "Wood Hath Hope." I learned that hymn was actually based on a Caryl Houselander poem. The homonyms of "wood" and "would" are used in such a beautiful way by Houselander. Yet she keeps the wood of a tree in the verse even as she switched from "wood" to "would." "If we could rise again, we would have hope. . . Like a tree we'd grown green again. . . We would have hope."

Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer has quickly become my favorite contemporary poet. And she is so prolific—writing a poem a day and sharing them wide and far. I get one in my inbox each day and often am delighted in reading them. Her poem, Hope, is wise and clever, too, with her image of walking and finding one's way with hope — "hope has holes in its pockets and it leaves little crumb trails so that we can find our way."

One could never write about hope and not at least mention Emily Dickinson's poem on hope, "the thing with feathers that perches in the soul." (And having had the recent opportunity to visit the home of Emily Dickinson in Amherst, Massachusetts, I am especially drawn to this poem of hers.) This Dickinson poem was re-printed in a book published in 2019 by Liturgical Press entitled Twenty Poems to Pray by Gary Bouchard. (I highly recommend it!) He comments that "When we find that we are at a loss of how to pray or what to pray, because of one of life's unexpected storms, . . . we may at least imagine a little bird perched in our soul, singing a tune that has no words . . . We can, in our extremity, let hope do the praying for us." (p. 21-22)

Bouchard reminds us of the part of St Francis' prayer, "where there is despair let me bring hope." He says, "In bringing the gift of hope to someone, we are really just acknowledging their hurt and worry and offering from our own human frailty some small gift of assurance that we pray can be nursed to life." Bouchard closes his chapter on HOPE with this thought: "But where there's despair, we have, from our own awkward inadequacy and bungling brokenness, at least brought 'the thing with feathers' that 'kept so many warm' — and we hope that with some care, and with some prayer, it will sing in our soul and in the souls of others once again." (p. 25)

Finally I share here Edwina Gately's poem, "Violet." It is good to know that this poet is a friend of our sisters in Erie and, in fact, has a hermitage on the grounds of their Glinodo Center on the banks of Lake Erie. The way Gately begins her poem, you would think she had written it in the midst of today's wars in Ukraine and Gaza. But in fact it appeared in her 2015 poetry collection called Soul Whispers. The surprise at the end of her poem is hinted at in the title.

I leave these four poems for you below to read and ponder and enjoy and, in so doing, embrace HOPE! I close these few thoughts on hope with a short line from the Rule of St. Benedict, RB 4:74: Never lose hope in God's mercy." (RB 4:74) We ask, O God, for this grace to be people of hope, to hope in your ever expanding mercy that can embrace us and our whole world. Amen.



HOPE and Some Poetry President's column (con't)

Wood Hath Hope

Wood hath hope.
When it's cut, it grows green again,
and its boughs sprout clean again.
Wood hath hope.

Root and stock, although old and withered up,
and all sunk in earth corrupt, will revive.
Leaves return. Water pure brings life to them,
and the tree lives young again.
Wood hath hope.

But ah, strange thought: if we could rise again,
called home to a loving land,
we would have hope.

We would have hope.
Like a tree we'd grow green again,
and our boughs sprout clean again;
we would have hope.
Caryll Houselander

HOPE

Hope has holes
in its pockets.
It leaves little
crumb trails
so that we,
when anxious,
can follow it.
Hope's secret:
it doesn't know
the destination –
it knows only
that all roads
begin with one
foot in front
of the other.
(Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer)

Hope

"Hope" is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all.

And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard

And sore must be the storm –
that could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –

I've heard it in the chilliest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
But – never – in Extremity –
It asked a crumb – of me.
(Emily Dickinson)

Violet

Driving along
The grey, soul-less freeway
Under leaden sky,
I listened to the radio
And its news of violence,
Brutality and war,
Reported, it seemed to me,
From all corners of the globe –
Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia . . .
And our own USA.
Endless fighting –
leaving all of us
and our planet –
eerily conscious of being
close wrapped
in gathering shrouds.

Then, as the traffic slowed,
I saw, on the freeway's edge,
peeping out from a tiny crevice
in the great concrete slab,
a tiny golden violet,
miraculously waving,
and smiling at me –
defying pollution and roaring traffic
with a magnificent display
of fragile beauty.
God – reminding me of resurrection.
And hope.
(Edwina Gately)

Deaths of well-known sisters in our monastic congregation in 2023

With the death of each of our sisters, we feel it intensely and there is great loss. We have felt such intense loss in the last year with deaths of sisters almost all of us knew because of their seeming luminous presence in the way they lived our monastic way of life. In many ways, these sisters were larger than life in the way they touched so many lives. Here we pay tribute, giving thanks for the good lives of Mary Lou Kownacki (Erie), Judith Ann Heble (Lisle), Patricia Crowley (Chicago) and Priscilla Cohen (Cullman). Ut in requiescant in pace.

Mary Lou Kownacki, Erie



Judith Ann (Judy) Heble, Lisle



Deaths of well-known sisters in our monastic congregation in 2023 (con't)

Patricia (Patsy) Crowley, Chicago



Priscilla Cohen, Cullman



By singling these Sisters out, we do not in any way wish to lessen the importance of the death of each and all of our Sisters. We give you thanks O God for the gift of community and for each sister who has responded to your call to live our monastic way of life. "Keep death daily before your eyes."

From the desk of our congregation archivist—Elaine Nadeau

On The Matter of Dress

Issues around the question of the clothing of Benedictines have been a topic of interest in the Congregation of St. Scholastica since its inception, even before the official start of the Congregation. At the August 1917 meeting, while working on the Constitution, glasses and fillings were one point of discussion: “it was difficult to arrive at a conclusion regarding the first part of the Declaration on Chapter XXXIII. Finally, the majority favored gold-framed spectacles as being absolutely necessary in so many cases, but they decided that the special permission of the Mother Prioress should be obtained when the dentist insisted on gold filling in teeth.” At the same meeting “it was conceded that uniformity in the Benedictine Dress has become imperative but it was thought best to settle that after the election of the Mother President.” There was already a balance being struck between necessity and perceived extravagance; sisters needed to see, but presumably, one filling was as good as the next. There was also a movement toward conformity within the ranks.

Another such issue, raised at the 1928 General Chapter was “shall we retain the large Rosary as part of our Religious Dress?” According to the 1932 General Chapter Minutes, six years previously, during the Abbot Primate’s official visit to the United States, he pointed out that “the Rosary is not a part of the Benedictine dress since the foundation of the Benedictine Order ante-dates the devotion of the Holy Rosary by several centuries.” At the 1928 meeting, no action was taken in regards to this question, but in 1932 a vote was taken and “the Chapter decreed that the wearing of the large rosary shall be discontinued.” While uniformity of Benedictine Dress was important and already identified as such in 1917, those familiar with the intricacies of the Benedictine habit can identify those from their own communities or identify members of other communities based upon how high or low, flat or protruding, various components were.

Dress was not again an official matter until 1956 when “asked whether or not a change of the Benedictine Habit is being considered, the Mothers and Delegates agreed that no change is needed to conform to the Holy Father’ ideals of simplicity and utility in the dress of religious.”

The 1960’s brought about a contentious period in relation to the clothing of the Benedictines, and, after the previous minor adjustments, is the first major change in Benedictine dress during the existence of the Congregation. In addition, there was a push and pull relationship between Sisters in the United States (of many orders) and Rome, and a balance had to be sought to avoid moving in this direction faster than Rome, while also creating opportunities for dialogue within communities themselves to allow for the changes to come from within, and those for whom change could not come fast enough.

At the General Chapter in 1962, thoughts were jotted down in relation to clothing. “Footgear and Clothing. Many suggestions regarding change of habit. Lighter washable material. Soft girdle. Habits shorter. Color, black, white, gray, lighter veil, sleeves narrower, less good in habit. Some want to keep coif, others say it is expensive and hard to make. Black underskirts and aprons. Nylon hose—wear longer. [...] Keep to poverty and simplicity.” The discussion would only continue to pick up pace with ideas and letters flying. There was pressure from all sides to either stay traditional or to quickly modernize. Sisters were unhappy with the pace of change—either too fast or not fast enough. In many ways it was a time of deep dissatisfaction. Mother Mary Susan wrote to an inquiring sister about these changes in 1966 that “the Holy Father, through the Sacred Congregation for Religious, has asked that all communities make adaptations in their traditional habit that will make it conform more to the dress of the twentieth century. We have been specifically told not to deviate to complete secular attire. [...] I was told directly that we should not bind face and forehead and that we should eliminate material from our habits.” She also wrote more firmly to another sister that “the Sacred Congregation for Religious, which is the mouthpiece of the Holy Father himself, has specifically stated that all religious communities should modify the habit. It has also specifically stated and demonstrated by withholding approval of suit-like attire that it wishes sisters to wear habits. I have confidence in the sincerity of Benedictines in general and feel that whatever modification is finally adopted will be a modest and dignified habit which will designate to seculars the consecration of the one who wears it.”



From the desk of our congregation archivist—Elaine Nadeau (con't)

In 1967 Mother Mary Susan wrote to one Prioress, “as to the habit itself, any style dress with a one piece effect could be worn under the scapular which, although thought necessary at this time by the congregation council, is subject to reconsideration in the future. Actually, through the questionnaire circulated last summer, the entire membership had an opportunity to show preference in this matter, and the vote was more than 2:1 in favor of the scapular.” While there was a great push towards modifying the habit, it was not the wish of many sisters. Guidelines were made to help communities grapple with the issue.

Still, the conversations continued. Sketches were done to show the modified habits and veils; photographs were sent with sister-models displaying the new clothes. And letters poured in to the Congregation President by sisters wishing to express their point of view.

“I’m sorry to belabor this point of dress again, and I wish that I would not have to do so, i.e. I wish that it were not in the hands of the congregation at all, and would like some attempt at a justification of its so being (since the Declarations, as I have noted, say nothing specific).” Wrote one sister to Mother Mary Susan in 1967. Sister Mother Mary Susan made her opinion of the matter fairly plain, writing back that “to a certain extent, our widespread concern with clothes is inane, but I do think that our clothes should be an expression of what we hope to be interiorly—dedicated, mature religious and also professional women. Only God can help us produce such a symbol.”

Many sisters were upset, even distressed, about the changes and felt that they were being forced along. “To be directed to drastically modify the habit and remove the coif and corona is upsetting enough, but the realization that the members of the Congregation of Saint Scholastica (many Consecrated Virgins) are a “heard of sheep” in this matter is far more appalling. [...] There is quite a difference between a permission and approval to do something or a mandate to do so. Is it really mandatory that we change our dress in this age of freedom and respect for the individual? No other external factor affects a woman more personally than dress. Much of the laity, along with our Bishop, suggest that we do not change because our habit is simple and practical and elicits due respect from them. To the laity it has been and should remain a symbol of our witness,” wrote another in 1966.

“I hope we won’t change our head piece as I think and many others do too, that our head gear is really a beautiful and simple one and I hope that all you Mothers will not change it, our coif namely. To those who claim that our coif is too hot, and that it is so hard to make, and that so much time is wasted on it, I say we should be able to suffer something, and a “hot” coif is a good way to do penance if there really is such a thing as a hot coif.”

One Mother in 1967 wrote of her community’s experimentation that “for the time being, we are doing nothing with the habit. Where the habit now being worn needs excessive mending, the number of pleats are being reduced, and the hem-line may be coming up a few inches. Other than that, we’re moving slowly. Time and personnel to do these things are prime factors with us.”

Yet another sister in 1967 seemed quite exasperated with the issue and the purposeful slowness of the changes. “I, personally, can’t see why all this preoccupation with clothes. If I wore jeans for scrubbing and had religious vows, I would still be a Sister. [...] Why are Benedictines always bogged down by paternalism, archaic practices, and conservatism? St. Benedict would certainly not let his feet drag after Vatican II. I just can’t picture St. Benedict not adapting and adjusting to the times. For his day, he was certainly forward looking and ahead of his times.”

In 1967 another Mother wrote “the more I see the more I return to my past opinion....that there is no in between... either habit or contemporary....and the times are too perilous for the latter. Why go to the expende (sic) as one priest told the Holy Cross Sister.. of coming yp (sic) to 1890 and stopping! Personally, I think we will save a lot of shakey (sic) people if we stablilize (sic) for a few years and get people educated to the idea of going contemporary. “

The President of the Congregation of St. Benedict wrote to Mother Mary Susan that the Congregations should move in this matter together, so that all the changes happened as a relatively united front. One Mother wrote to commiserate with the difficult position that Mother Mary Susan found herself in, attempting to keep everyone moving together to a point of view where they might settle.

From the desk of our congregation archivist—Elaine Nadeau (con't)

While clothing has, at times, been a tumultuous area for Benedictines to navigate, it also helped to engender a more serious focus on communication, particularly as a collective across both community and Congregation lines, to ensure the relatively “uniformity” that earlier Mothers found so important. The synchronous movement involved much discussion and brought communities to a settling-point in which the multiplicity of thought could coexist.”

CIB Update – Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum

The 2023 meeting of the CIB Conference of Delegates was held in September here in the USA at the home of the CIB moderator – Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama. What a joy it was to have Benedictine women there from all over the world. The Cullman Benedictines did a remarkable job of welcoming this global group of Benedictines and found rich communion in doing so.

During the meeting there were outstanding American Benedictine speakers in Ephrem Hollermann (St. Benedict’s Monastery, Minnesota) and Joan Chittister (Mount St Benedict Monastery, Erie). The challenge was to move into the future with hope and commitment, while remembering the graces of our past.

A large part of the business of the meeting was led by Sister Scholastika Häring, OSB, a canonist of Germany, together with the members of the CIB juridic study commission which Scholastika chairs. The other members of the study commission are Patricia Henry (Mexico), Noemi Scarpa (Italy) and Nancy Bauer (USA). They led the discussion that was part of an ongoing conversation among the women of CIB the last few years about potentially re-structuring CIB , hopefully enabling CIB to be of more service to women Benedictines around the world. The essence of the proposal under consideration is forming a parallel structure to the Benedictine Confederation of monks, alongside it rather than under the auspices of the men’s



CIB 2023 meeting at Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman



Upcoming Dates for President’s Travel 2024

April 13-19th	Schuyler, NE to speak (alongside Rosann Ocken, OSB) to North American Benedictine Vocation and Formation Conference (NABVFC) Symposium
April 25-28th	Pittsburgh—visitation at St. Benedict Monastery
May 1st-4th	Lisle—graduation of South African Sister Alberta Khwela, OSB and visit with Sister Theodora Ntuli and Sister Scholastica Mpanza from Alberta’s community of Twasana Priory in South Africa
May 5th-10th	Newark, DE—pastoral visit at St. Gertrude Monastery
May 16th	Zoom meeting with prioresses of our congregation
May 17-20th	Clyde, MO—attend 150th anniversary of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration
May 30th	Zoom meeting with MCSS Council
Jun 2nd-7th	Cullman, AL—community retreat at Sacred Heart Monastery
July 3rd-8th	Yankton, SD—55 & Under gathering at Sacred Heart Monastery
July 12-17th	Cullman—summer community meetings at Sacred Heart Monastery
July 24th	Zoom meeting with MCSS council
July 29-Aug 11th	Tanzania—visits to numerous monasteries of the Benedictine Sisters
Aug 13-17th	Orlando—LCWR annual meeting
Sept 1st-8th	Assisi—CIB Conference of Delegates annual meeting
Sept 9-20th	Rome—Congress of Abbots at Sant’ Anselmo
Sept 25th	Zoom meeting with MCSS Council
Oct 1st-4th	Orlando—RCRI annual assembly
Oct 9-13th	Chicago—visitation at St. Scholastica Monastery
Nov 8-9th	Cullman—community meeting at Sacred Heart Monastery
Nov 25th-Dec 7th	Spain—AIM International Council meeting & visits to Spanish monasteries

CIB Update – Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (con't)

confederation as it is currently. It would also mean a full-time salaried position for the CIB moderator in the future who would travel more extensively, much like the abbot primate currently does, and also to be a liaison to the Vatican for Benedictine women. In addition, the policy making arm of the CIB which is currently known as the Conference of Delegates (delegates elected from each region of the world – 19 regions in all) would change to a conference of all presidents of monastic congregations and federations. This would mean a larger assembly – since there are approximately 13,000 Benedictine women in the world, we expect potentially 60 and maybe even up to 80 congregations and federations, many of which are still forming in response to the mandate of the Vatican in Cor Orans (2018). It is expected that organizing along lines of congregations and federations would enable better communication, relying on presidents communicating with their member monasteries rather than delegates who may or may not have direct connection to the monasteries in their regions.

The next meeting of the CIB Conference of Delegates will be held at the guest house of Monastero San Giuseppe in Assisi in early September. During the CIB meeting in Assisi, the delegates look forward to welcoming some of the abbesses of Italy from the surrounding area to come for a day of the meeting, to learn more about the ongoing discussions of potential changes to CIB. After the completion of the meeting in Assisi, the CIB delegates will travel to Rome to attend as observers at the quadrennial Congress of Abbots to be held at Sant' Anselmo. The latter is an opportunity for the international superiors of women's and men's monasteries to get to know one another better and to collaborate. There are excellent workshops offered during the Congress, as well as assembly wide speakers. In addition, it is expected that the Congress of Abbots will elect a new abbot primate, who will succeed American Gregory Polan of Conception Abbey in Missouri.



American Benedictines at 2023 CIB meeting in Cullman

CIB Update – Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum (con't)



Scholastika Häring, OSB (Germany, canonist)



CIB Juridic Study Committee in Cullman

CLAR – Manifest of Care

Sister Maricarmen Bracamontes of Torreon has been central in the work of CLAR (Confederation of Latin American Religious) over many years. Her work with CLAR is ongoing. During the recent meeting of the MCSS Council held at her monastery, Maricarmen shared about CLAR and its important work at the IV Congress of Religious Life from which came its Manifest of Care. Since 2006 Maricarmen has been a key member of CLAR-ETAP, a team of theologians who serve as advisers to the CLAR presidency. You can read about their current work in the area of synodality and read the many articles they have produced at this link: [Contributions to the 2023 Synod - ETAP - About Us | Latin American Confederation of Religious \(clar.org\)](#)



In the introduction to the important document from the 2023 CLAR Congress, entitled Manifest of Care, these words are included:

We gather without ignoring that the world is at war, that corruption permeates everything, that between the nationalisms that exclude and the strongholds that we build to divide us, we are condemning many people to live in a state of migration. And here we are, Lord of care; we hunger and thirst for peace and justice, and we persevere in an itinerant, intercultural and inter-congregational mysticism, prophecy, and mission, which allows us to understand our identity and mission in communion and solidarity with the culture, struggles and lives of our people.

Along these days we have listened the outcries and the songs; joy came to visit us and we've been often moved to tears; we have embraced our humanity and felt that it is the time of conversion. The voice of the young people resounded loudly to confront us. We are outraged by the excesses of institutionalism and dehumanizing norms that deny rights and opportunities, that exclude and condemn so many sisters and brothers to no longer be here. In view of a reality like this, it is clear to us that conversion, reform, and the need for a new way of life are urgently needed. Lord, at the echo of your voice and with the certainty that we are sacraments of your unique creative and caring identity, we get ready to go through the night, clothed in hope. In synodality with the Church that listens and discerns, we want today to join that caravan that boldly cares for communion, and so we ask for the grace to be clothed with prophetic courage and to open new paths to . . .

From there, there are 10 areas described that demand action and commitment.

It is both inspiring and challenging to read these words of the IV Congress on Religious Life of CLAR. To read the whole Manifest of Care from CLAR in English, see

[Manifest Of Care_EN \(jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net\)](#)

To read the original Manifest of Care (Manifiesto del Cuidado) in Spanish, see

[Manifiesto del Cuidado \(jimdo-storage.global.ssl.fastly.net\)](#)

We are proud of Hermana Maricarmen and the important theological work she does in collaboration with theologians from all over Latin America!

Monastic Congregation Council meets

The monastic community at Monasterio Pan de Vida in Torreon, Coahuila, Mexico, graciously hosted the meeting of the council of the monastic congregation in January 2024. We were all present, though one had to be virtually present due to icy conditions preventing travel to Mexico.



It is always good for us, when possible, to be together in person. The opportunity to live the daily horarium of the monastic community in Torreon was wonderful. We enjoyed praying together in their chapel and having our meals together with the monastic community. The Mexican fare is always tasty! And meeting at CEDIMSE, the monastery's center for women and children located just down the block from the monastery, was a great experience. In addition to our business meetings, we also had the privilege

Council gathered in meeting at CEDIMSE, near monastery. See Elaine Fischer on computer screen via Zoom

of hearing from a panel of speakers organized by Sister Mariana of Torreon. They spoke to us primarily about the epidemic of missing persons in Mexico – young people kidnapped and apparently caught up in human trafficking. The sadness of the stories of the parents we heard from was heart breaking. During our meeting we agreed to give a donation to their organization in which Mariana is deeply involved. May all missing children be returned to their grieving parents. May all children be protected and allowed to enjoy childhood as it should be lived – freely and with joy.

One of the days during our meetings, we also prayed morning prayer with the community of oblates and friends that gathers regularly at CEDIMSE. It was a moving experience to be a part of their shared lectio. Clearly the lives of our sisters at Monasterio Pan de Vida make such a difference in the life of their neighborhood and surrounding areas. The sisters are counted on for their presence and prayer.

In addition to this in person meeting in January 2024, there have been multiple virtual meetings of the congregation council via Zoom. These meetings are scheduled approximately every two months in order to address issues in the congregation as they arise and to advise the president with ongoing issues. The members of the congregation council are committed to serving our congregation and reflect that by their preparation for each and every council meeting and sharing their wisdom in the meetings.

Monastic Congregation Council meets (con't)



Panel of parents of the disappeared



Panel at prayer

Monastic Congregation Council meets (con't)

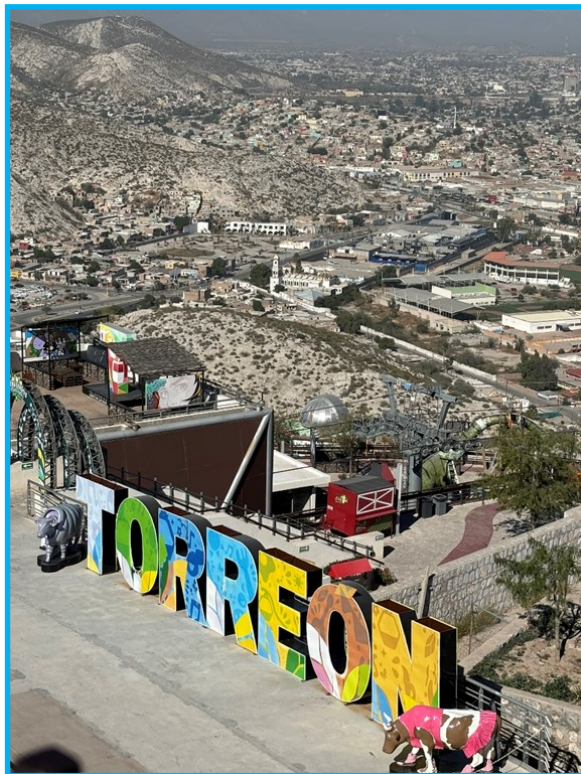


Congregation Council with Panel of speakers and their facilitator, Hna Mariana (center front)



Pan de Vida community with Council after Mass

Monastic Congregation Council meets (con't)



At Cristo de Las Noas, Torreon

55 and Under Report

55&Under Report

January, 2024

Submitted to CBP by S. Maria Victoria Cutaia

Planning Committee:

Sr. Maria Victoria Cutaia from Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, MO-Cochair

Sr. Sarah Elizabeth McMahon from the Missionary Benedictines in Norfolk, NE- Cochair

Sr. Elizabeth Carrillo—MCSS: Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, KS

Sr. Carmella Luke—MCSG: Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, SD

Sr. Raphaela Cady—MCSB: St. Placid Priory, Lacey, WA

Sr. Candyce Chrystal will be our facilitator for our third gathering. Sr. Candy is from Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, SD.

The planning committee was tasked by the presidents to engage the younger members of our monasteries in a three-year process of visioning which we have entitled, Embracing Our Future with Joy. The progression of themes is as follows: Year 1 - meaning making and charism; Year 2 - collaboration/building bridges; Year 3 - exploring/envisioning new organizational structures. The first of our gatherings, Fire for the Journey: Engaging Our Charism, took place in April of 2022 and explored the distinctive elements of our Benedictine charism. Our second gathering, Companions on the Journey: Building Bridges of Hope, happened in July of 2023 and focused on the topic of collaboration within our 55 & Under cohort, between our monastic communities and congregations, and beyond. Working groups emerged with the task of designing and proposing a collaborative project that will exemplify the theme of collaboration. These proposals will be presented at the third and final gathering, **Vision for the Journey: Living into our Emerging Future, to be held in Yankton July 5-8, 2024.**

Our goal is to foster and continue building relationships among our younger members to discern together the future direction of Benedictine monasticism.

Third Gathering Overview

We are planning an in-person gathering, where collaborative groups from the previous gathering will present proposals which they have researched and refined throughout the year. The planning committee is in conversation with the presidents about the implementation process we will be presenting at our gathering. The collaborative project groups are:

- Art Council,
- Benedictine Classes in Parishes,
- Environment,
- Social & Service Experience,
- New Inter-Congregational Seed Community,
- Interculturality,
- Leadership Training,
- Cross Community Mentorship,
- Specialty Support Teams,
- Collaborative Vocation Ministry

55 and Under Report (con't)

During the gathering, each collaborative group will give a formal presentation of their work since the last gathering and submit a written report and self-evaluation. Ongoing projects that come from this work will be accountable to the Conference of Benedictine Prioresses. The gathering will also generate a plan for the next 55&Under Gathering in terms of frequency and topic.

A panel will be discussing emerging models for monastic living and carrying our Benedictine charism into the future.

A note about age limit

As noted in the registration form for our first gathering, sisters who have made either their first or final profession and who were age 55 or under on January 1, 2022, are eligible to attend. Please keep in mind that all who were eligible to attend the first gathering remain eligible to attend throughout the three years.

Finance

Rejoice with us! Back in November, Sr. Jeanne sent you all this insert about the award letter we received from LCWR:

“From Sr. Carol Zinn: I appreciated the opportunity to speak with you about the committee’s decision about your grant application. As I shared with you, the committee was delighted to read your application and see its alignment with the purpose and intention of the Designated Fund. We eagerly approve your application in the amount of \$9,410 and are also awarding an additional \$14,590 for a total award amount of \$24,000 for the gathering of the 55 & Under Benedictine sisters as they discern, together, a viable pathway forward for their future religious life. We look forward to learning what unfolds in the program.”

Because of this, we lowered the registration fee this year to \$200.00. We will also have funds to help some of the proposals move into the implementation stage. The LCWR review committee also encouraged us to continue to apply in the future to help fund these types of projects.



RADICAL HOSPITALITY – responses from prioresses for Gyrovagi

At our 2022 Centennial General Chapter, the theme was *Radical Hospitality of the Heart: El Camino de la Portera* (the way of the porter). As you will recall, we had excellent presentations by Judith Sutura (Atchison) and Maricarmen Bracamontes, as well as good discussions.

In light of that important centennial chapter, the houses of our congregation were asked to write something about how radical hospitality has been embraced in their communities. We are grateful for their responses and even more for their commitments, in a variety of ways, to live radical hospitality. Here are responses we received at *Gyrovagi* from some of the member monasteries:

Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie

At Mount St. Benedict, in addition to our many ministries in the city of Erie, while it might not be very "radical," we have our latest effort to introduce more people to the monastery and Benedictine values. We also are trying to recruit younger people to come and live with us for a time as interns. On a smaller scale, the sisters who work at St. Benedict Education Center often bring some Muslim families to the monastery for special events. We are always looking for new ways to welcome people.

On Saturday, March 9 a monastery tour was given to introduce new people to the monastery and to monastic life. The response for this tour was positive, with around 30 registrants, some coming from as far as Pittsburgh and spending the night as guests. Interest about our monastery and our Benedictine monastic life is alive and well.

The tour began in the chapel where a couple sisters were stationed to share with them about prayer, lectio, and listening in the Rule. After chapel, the group went to the front parlor to learn about hospitality and beauty from other sisters. The group then went to the library to learn about study and formation, work and stewardship. Finally, the entire group met again in the community room and sisters shared about stability and community.

Those participating in the monastery tour had an opportunity to return to the library and to the Chapter 57 gift shop. They then joined the monastic community for supper and vigil.

On Monday, March 11 and Tuesday, March 12 the staff, volunteers, and board members of our Benedictine ministries, as well as our Mount staff gathered for a half-day session learning about Benedictine history, values, and the incorporation of these values into the ministry work. This allowed all who participated to become more knowledgeable and to connect with the other Erie Benedictine ministries.

St Gertrude Monastery, Newark DE:

A relative of one of our Benedictine Sisters had major surgery and requested a period of respite with us. This was unusual in our small and conservative monastery but willingly and graciously accepted by all after some discussion. Mary Margaret remained with us for two months participating in meals schedules, recreational gatherings and some periods of prayer. For us, it was a major deviation from the norm and a radical yes to hospitality.

For the feast of St. Benedict on March 21, we welcomed eight Benedictine Sisters from India who minister in nearby Wilmington. It was a wonderful experience of Benedictine communion. We are grateful for their nearby presence. These Benedictines have also joined us for other occasions. Such gatherings are always a source of joy and energy for us.

RADICAL HOSPITALITY – responses from prioresses for Gyrovagi (con't)

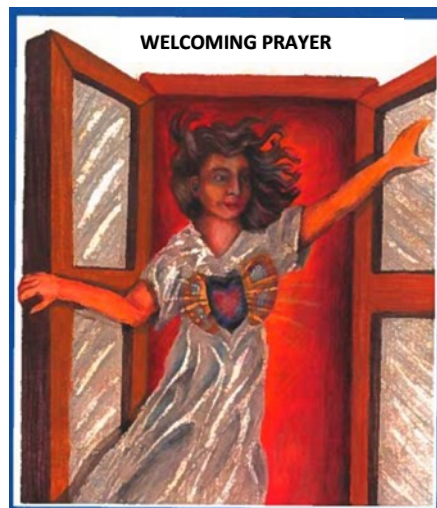
St. Benedict Monastery, Bristow

We have opened our Multi-Purpose Room to a local Muslim community for their morning and evening prayer. At times, we need to juggle schedules and room needs and ask them to go to our music room instead so that this community can pray daily. We also opened the conference room at St. Cecilia's (administrative offices) for the Saturday morning youth group meetings. Right now, they are here with wives and children every night in preparation for Ramadan.

Benet Hill Monastery, Colo Springs

Benet Hill Monastery has integrated the call from the Monastic Chapter of 2022 in the following humble ways.

The liturgy team rewrote our prayer for vocation to include women and men , all seekers as they discern their individual call to response to God by becoming associated with Benet Hill as sisters, oblates, associates and friends.



God of our Futuring,
bless women and men with the gift of courage
to respond to your call.
Open their hearts that they may discern your Holy will.
Instill within us openness, confidence and grace
to invite seekers to embrace
the Benedictine values at Benet Hill Monastery.
Together may we be graced with good zeal for the work
of justice, peace, loving hospitality, prayer
and service to your wounded world and all people.
We pray and trust all in Jesus' name. Amen.

RADICAL HOSPITALITY – responses from prioresses for Gyrovagi (con't)

At the reception desk, we have framed the picture we received at the Chapter. It is hung where people entering can see it. We discussed with our staff receptionist Chapter 53 on receiving the guest. It is our way of raising our employees' awareness, intention and welcoming presence of receiving all as Christ.

We consistently bring the guest to meet the Prioress, so she can welcome them. All retreatants are prayed for in our Liturgy of the Hours and when they leave we intentionally bless them. It is a sacred moment for them and for us.

Our radical hospitality goes outward through our gathering coats for the immigrants. And, rather than focusing the attention on us during Catholic Sisters Week, we sponsored and coordinate an event called: STUFF THE TRUCK. All the food, drinks and diapers go to the Eastside Cares that then gets distributed to 8 food pantries through Colorado Springs. In 2023, we filled 6 large pick up trucks. This year we are renting a large Penske truck for the event!

Emmanuel Monastery, Baltimore

This past September, realizing that our relationship with our Oblates, PACEM members and SoulJourners was deepening, we decided to make a change in the wording of our Mission Statement and in the response we pray at the end of the Liturgy of the Hours each day. In our Mission Statement we replaced the phrase "Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore" with the "the Community of Emmanuel Monastery." Our response at the end of prayer was changed to "with all in our community." We felt all the above best reflected the inclusive nature of our broadening community.

We continue our relationship with the Amiry family (the Afghan woman who came in 2010, gave birth to a son, and lived here for 2½ years, were reunited with her husband, and now live in Lutherville) as they struggle with the present issues in Gaza, Afghanistan and Iran. They still have family in that part of the world, so the victims have names and faces.

We prepared for a birthday party at the monastery on March 10 when little Zakki turned 3; and 13 year old Amin is coming to speak to the community during the next week about Ramadan and the Holy Koran, since the three religions: Islam, Judaism and Christianity have their holy seasons during the same month this year. Amin has been studying his tradition for several years now. (3 yo Zakki below)



RADICAL HOSPITALITY – responses from prioresses for Gyrovagi (con't)

Holy Name Monastery, Saint Leo, FL

Nothing spectacular – all little touches that changed the lives of God’s People whose lives we touch:

- + We re-opened doors (after 20 months of complete shut-down) to visitors, guests and retreat groups
- + Trusting in God alone, while cheerfully driving our guests to and from the airport, in and out of downtown Tampa, sometimes late at night, on complicated interstate highways where some are recklessly cutting in and out of lane at speeds well above the 75mph baseline at which the rest of the heavy traffic is moving, concealing my anxiety for the safety of all involved in the mad rush, while projecting a comforting air of calm and confidence.
- + During close down I discovered an interest in gardening which continues
- + Have donated additional volunteer time at the food pantry
- + Acquired additional spiritual directees
- + Held Ecumenical Unity Prayer Service co-hosted by local parish
- + Local ministerial association holds its monthly meeting at monastery
- + Our 10 Sisters are making individual Lenten alms donations to 15 various organizations
- + Our world view has widened through the “window” of ZOOM
- + Re-started Peace and Justice committee (a subcommittee of corporate committee members)
- + Hosted international students studying in Lisle to spend time in our aquaponic / fishery farm operation – had classes and experience (sponsored by AIM)
- + Expanded interest in our aquaponic + fish farm: more visitors, new volunteers and university interns
- + gave temporary housing to transitional faculty at SLU (hunting for permanent housing) - one such guest was a Ukrainian citizen
- + Collaborated with local parish to provide grocery gift cards in food baskets at Thanksgiving
- + Thrift Store has expanded from 3 to 5 days of open for business
- + Hosting ecumenical group retreats
- + Oblate meetings via ZOOM and on site
- + We welcome all who drop in to pray with us, request tours of monastery and hospitality information

St. Walburg Monastery, Covington, KY

Hospitality for refugees

In 2021 and 2022 we had the opportunity to provide temporary housing for refugee families from Afghanistan and

RADICAL HOSPITALITY – responses from prioresses for Gyrovagi (con't)

Congo. They were able to use one of our houses until a permanent home could be found for them. The Kentucky Refugee Coalition brought them to us and provided support until a permanent home could be found.

Each of the families had several children and we enjoyed seeing them play and have a sense of freedom that they hadn't had in their home country. It was somewhat difficult to communicate with the first two families from Afghanistan. We used our phones as translators but realized that one of the mothers could not read. The last family from Congo were devout Catholics and attended Sunday Mass with us. Communication was easier since they had extended family who could translate for us. They were eager to learn English themselves.

We appreciate being able to provide a sanctuary for them as they made their way to our area and a new life here.

St. Lucy's Priory, Glendora

In 2022 we offered an apartment on our property to an alumna and daughter of an employee working through some personal challenges. While a rather safe situation since she is generally able to care for herself and family is nearby when extra help is needed, we are still challenged to accommodate her family and friends being on the property and giving time and energy to needed communication.

While our hospitality at the Priory in Glendora and the retreat house in Grand Terrace may appear ordinary, it is not happening without personal and community commitments to interruption and schedule changes as retreats, prayer gatherings, meetings, invitations to dinner and other events take place especially in evenings. We also do a variety of tasks to plan and then accommodate those who join us for events.

Gatherings at Grand Terrace include weekly prayer groups focusing on those who are ill, study groups including women's issues as well as care of the labyrinth on the grounds. Saturday retreats are offered on a regular basis and on-line prayer options have been made available in recent years. Our Benedictine Guild meets at the Priory for regular monthly events. Retreats, funerals, various celebrations and meetings are also hosted. Recently we responded to a request from a local Catholic organization needing storage space for their clothing drive. This connection has led to also providing for their periodic gatherings.

Our hospitality might be most visible in the constant moving of furniture, adding seating spaces in our chapel, dining room and living rooms as needed. A few years ago we renovated the Priory kitchen area. While the changes make life more convenient for us, we were also attempting to be more accommodating to those who help with events.

More than anything, we are being stretched in our realization that hospitality requires the generous giving of our time as we are called to be active participants in the lives of our guests.

St Scholastica Monastery, Boerne, TX

In Eagle Pass, Texas we have been about hospitality since we arrived in 1996. The Felician Franciscans used to come by the house on Encinal St. to visit and spend the night before heading on to Ejido Santa Maria in Mexico. It gave them a chance to rest from their trip which originated in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At times they were loaded with donations and could not take everything with them into Mexico. We would store the things for them until they could come back for them. This went on for several years. The sisters knew they were always welcome regardless of what time they arrived.

RADICAL HOSPITALITY – responses from prioresses for Gyrovagi (con't)

As time went on, folks from Houston were looking into mission work closer to home so we provided them with the opportunity to work at the orphanages in Piedras Negras. Our home was too small to accommodate our missionaries so in 2004 when we were asked to dream, my dream was to have a mission house where our missionaries and volunteers could come and stay and return to work the following day reenergized. This dream became a reality, and we purchased a large home in Eagle Pass in December of 2004 and moved in on April 1st, 2005. Our friends, the Felician Franciscans and several volunteers helped us to get the house in order and soon we were welcoming missionaries and volunteers into our mission house. As the numbers increased, we added more beds.

When the immigrants started appearing in Eagle Pass, we opened our door to them when we did not have missionaries/volunteers. Though we had only 28 beds, at one point we had to house 42 immigrants.

All our projects were a part of our charism of hospitality. With radical hospitality, we have been asked to open our doors to reporters coming to see the immigration reality in Eagle Pass. They come to see for themselves what is actually happening so as to give a more accurate reporting of our immigration situation. We open not just our home but ourselves to the hundreds of questions to which they seek answers.

In addition to this, we are providing housing for a young mother with 2 children so she can save money and be able to afford her own apartment. God has given us the means through our many and we seek to make good use of our resources.

With radical hospitality we can be open to have folks disrupt our peace and be welcomed as Christ. No one is too insignificant or unimportant. We are all a part of our larger world community and so we welcome each other as brothers and sisters in Christ.



MCSS President/CIB Moderator speaks at gathering of Young European Benedictine Women (YEBW) in Germany

Similar to the 55 & Under gatherings of younger Benedictine women in the USA, the European Benedictines also gather. The meetings are for those Benedictine women who are age 50 and under. The most recent meeting was held in October 2023 at the monastery in Tutzing, Germany, hosted by the Missionary Benedictine Sisters congregation. In attendance were 20 Benedictine women from the following countries: Germany, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Poland and Lithuania.

The meeting room at the guesthouse of the Tutzing Benedictines was brimming with energy and joy, and lots of ideas. They come from various congregations, just as our sisters at our 55 & Under gatherings do. The first evening was devoted to introducing themselves to one another, using a map of Europe and many photos of monastic communities from which they came.

The chosen theme for the gathering was the Benedictine Art of Synodality. Lynn McKenzie was invited to Germany to speak and engage with the YEBW on this topic. She spoke on these aspects of Benedictine synodality: active listening, community discernment, inclusiveness, shared responsibility, flexibility and adaptability, prayer and seeking and personal and community growth. In addition to Lynn's presentation, Tutzing Benedictine Mechtild Hommel who spoke on the German Synodal movement. It was good to learn about this topic from someone who has been locally involved in this movement, and it was challenging, too. It inspired a lot of discussion and debate from the various points of view represented in the YEBW group.

In addition to the more formal presentations, the sisters had the opportunity to go on an outing to Munich, to hike on a beautiful day, and to gather at the lake across the street from the Tutzing monastery and to share richly with each other about their monastic vocation according to the Rule of Benedict. Each night at the end of the days' meetings, the sisters gathered for Compline in the small chapel of the guest house and prayed the Psalms in a different language each night. It was a beautiful experience of synodality in an international group. It was an honor to be among them.



MCSS President/CIB Moderator speaks at gathering of Young European Benedictine Women (YEBW) in Germany (con't)



2022-2026 Direction Statement – progress with actions

At the 2022 General Chapter we set direction statements in five areas, as noted below. As you review these and think of what you have been pursuing in your own community since 2022, how have you or how do you en flesh these statements that were adopted by the members of the General Chapter? Would you please talk with your council/chapter about this and send to Lynn your actions or policies that your community has done in any or all of these areas? **(Please send to Lynn by July 27, 2024.)** Below, under each of the five areas, are listed what the monastic congregation council has said that the council/congregation has done toward these direction statements. Perhaps they will give you ideas for your discussion in your own community.

The Monastic Congregation President and Council will assist and support the member monasteries of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica...

1. To recognize, name, and navigate their critical junctures.

“Creating a Legacy” presentation by Judith Ann Heble and Mary Bratrsovsky;
Review of Visitation and Interim Visitation reports with appropriate follow-up.
Naming future-planning and succession-planning
Questions being added in revised Visitation Guidelines
President’s work with individual communities in 2023 and continuing
Work of Congregation archivist with communities



2. To respond to global justice issues from our Benedictine monastic charism.

Initiative for financial support of Benedictine Sisters in the Ukraine;
On-going support for BCRI (Benedictine Coalition for Responsible Investment);
Initiative requesting assistance at the southern border by community members.
Financial Support for work of *Voz Ques Clama Justicia Por Personas Desaparecidas* in Mexico

3. To strengthen our Benedictine identity and mission through radical hospitality.

Theme of 2022 General Chapter, with “The Role of the Portress” by Judith Sutera and reflections on “Fratelli Tutti” and Benedictine hospitality by Maricarmen Bracamontes as keynote presentations.
Published several member monasteries actions on radical hospitality in Spring 2024 issue of Gyrovagi
Addressing issue raised about Oblates of monasteries coming to completion – joined with other women’s monastic congregations and named an intercongregation study committee on this topic

4. By exploring new forms of networking and collaboration with Benedictines nationally, internationally, and intergenerationally in order to foster creative new ways of living monastic life.

On-going work of the Council and reliance on each other;
Support for “55 and Under” group;
Gyrovagi publication.
Lynn addressed the meeting of the Young European Benedictine Women in Tutzing Germany in Oct 2023, and, in addition to her assigned topic of The Benedictine Art of Synodality, shared with them what the 55&Under gatherings in USA have been about as well as the work of our congregation.
Addressing issue about Oblates of member monasteries coming to completion – intercongregation study committee on this topic

2022-2026 Direction Statement – progress with actions (con't)

“55 and Under” projects with younger members of monasteries working together on specific projects that go beyond the immediate area of any one monastery
Assisting with establishing new monastery in Micronesia monastery
Exploring having a Benedictine program for women in transfer in our monastic communities – brought this to the attention of CBP, which has agreed to have a speaker for CBP on the need for such a program. Lynn suggested to CBP a good speaker who has years of experience in assisting transfers and the communities to which and from which they are transferring.

5. To understand the urgency of exploring and establishing their legacy.

Support for Inter-Congregation Archives Central Repository Project

The congregation archivist, Elaine Nadeau, has visited some of our member monasteries and assisted with their archives in terms of organization and also moved one or two member monasteries' archives to the congregation archives in Atchison

Questions being added by revised Visitation Guidelines address this
Presentations at 2022 Chapter by Judith Heble and Elaine Nadeau

2022 Centennial General Chapter of the Federation of St. Scholastica

Direction Statements adopted:

The Monastic Congregation President and Council will assist and support the member monasteries of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica...

1. To recognize, name, and navigate their critical junctures.
2. To respond to global justice issues from our Benedictine monastic charism.
3. To strengthen our Benedictine identity and mission through radical hospitality.
4. By exploring new forms of networking and collaboration with Benedictines nationally, internationally, and inter-generationally in order to foster creative new ways of living monastic life.
5. To understand the urgency of exploring and establishing their legacy.

Monastic Congregation Member Statistics

Data from:

Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica
 Autonomous Houses of Religious Women
 Annual Statistical Questionnaire

Data as of December 31, 2023					
	(1) Postulants	(2) Novices	(3) Professed		Totals
			First	Perpetual	
Atchison	0	1	0	85	86
Baltimore	0	0	0	11	11
Boerne	0	0	1	12	13
Bristow	0	1	0	25	26
Chicago	0	0	0	19	19
Colorado Springs	0	0	0	20	20
Covington	0	0	1	25	26
Cullman	0	0	0	31	31
Elizabeth	0	0	0	21	21
Erie	0	0	3	70	73
Glendora	0	0	0	4	4
Liberty	0	0	0	1	1
Lisle	0	0	0	15	15
Pittsburgh	0	0	0	32	32
Newark/Ridgely	0	0	0	11	11
St. Leo	0	0	0	11	11
Torreón	0	0	1	5	6
Tulsa	0	0	1	10	11
TOTAL	0	2	7	408	417

Monastic Congregation Member Statistics (con't)

Data from:

Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica
 Autonomous Houses of Religious Women
 Annual Statistical Questionnaire

	(4) Increase of professed nuns during the year by				(5) Decrease of professed nuns during the year by					
	(A) Profession		(B) Transfer from		(C) Other	(A) Death	(B) Departure	(C) Transfer to		(D) Other
	(a) First	(b) Perpetual	(a) OSB	(b) Other Order				(a) OSB	(b) Other Order	
Atchison				1		4				
Baltimore						0				
Boerne						0				
Bristow						2				
Chicago						2				
Colorado Springs						2				
Covington						2				
Cullman						1				
Elizabeth						1				
Erie						3				
Glendora						0				
Liberty						0				
Lisle						1				
Pittsburgh						2				
Newark/Ridgely						1				
St. Leo						0				
Torreon						0				
Tulsa						1	1			
TOTALS				1		22	1			