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Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica

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

Spring 2023

Gyrovagi

## Spring Elections in the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica

### Inside this issue:

Spring Elections	1-2
Like a Mustard Seed Book	2
100 years and counting	3
CIB Conference in Rome 2022	4
How Do We Begin to Plan for the Future, to Move Forward in Transition	5
What's in a Name	6
President's Travel	6
New Logo	7
New Book	8
Benedictine Life	
Archives	9



Mary Susan Remsgar, OSB, elected prioress of St. Scholastica Monastery in Chicago

In mid-April 2023, the monastic chapter of St. Scholastica Monastery in Chicago held its quadrennial election discernment process and elected [Sister Mary Susan Remsgar](#) as their next prioress.

The discernment process was facilitated by Elaine Fischer, OSB (Atchison, 1<sup>st</sup> Councilor of the congregation). True to Elaine's gifts, she was creative and calm in leading the process, and the sisters of Chicago experienced much peace. Echoing the name of our congregation centennial colloquium (Benedictine Life: A Vision Unfolding), after her election, Sister Mary Susan said, "With God's help and grace, I hope to bring all the gifts with which God has blessed me in faithful service to my sisters as we move together toward the future God is unfolding for us." Mary Susan will be installed as the 20<sup>th</sup> prioress of St. Scholastica Monastery on June 18, 2023.



S. Lynn McKenzie, OSB  
Congregation President



Blessing of Prioress-elect in Chicago

## Spring Elections in the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica (cont.)

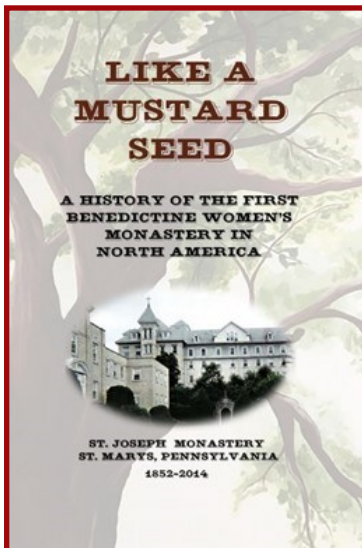


Pictured above a happy newly re-elected Joanna Burley in pink, with (from L-R), election discernment facilitators Jane Becker (Ferdinand), Christine Ereiser (Tulsa), and congregation president, Lynn McKenzie.

**Joanna Burley, OSB**, re-elected prioress of St. Benedict Monastery in Bristow, Virginia.

Led by Sisters Jane Becker (Ferdinand) and Christine Ereiser (Tulsa) in April 2023, the election facilitation process evolved for the Benedictine Sisters of Virginia and culminated in the re-election of Sister Joanna Burley, who is completing her first term as prioress. It was a grace-filled weekend and there was much rejoicing. When the election result was announced at the large St. Benedict Monastery Sunday assembly gathered for Mass on the 3rd Sunday of Easter, there was huge and extended applause. Sister Joanna said that with the help of her sisters, she will gladly continue to serve as prioress.

### *Like a Mustard Seed: A History of the First Benedictine Women's Monastery in North America.*



Ephrem Hollermann, history of St. Joseph Monastery in St. Marys, PA

About writing this important history, author Ephrem Hollermann, OSB said: "It was my great privilege to be commissioned to write this history by the Federation of St. Scholastica. It was a blessed opportunity for me to further my conviction that the full story of American Catholicism will not be known until the stories of women religious have been lifted out of the shadows of mainstream history into their rightful place as stalwart shapers of an American Catholic identity and ethos."

The timing of the 2022 publication of this book was perfect and also intentional – it coincided with the centennial of the monastic congregation of St. Scholastica, whose first house was St. Joseph Monastery in St. Marys, Pennsylvania. At the centennial general chapter in June 2022, all houses of the monastic congregation were gifted with a copy of this book.

The book is available for purchase now at [Like A Mustard Seed \(lulu.com\)](https://www.lulu.com/it/item/like-a-mustard-seed) for \$18.00 plus shipping. It is an important book for every monastic library to have. With every copy sold, a small amount is sent to the monastic congregation.



## **We're Still Here!**



One hundred years and counting, our monastic congregation is still here, despite changes to our title in those years! But clearly this anniversary is more than us just simply being here. Rather, it is a way for us to challenge ourselves to continue authentically living the Benedictine charism, imagining it anew for our time. In June 2022 we had a wonderful centennial celebration during our general chapter of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica. The general chapter was followed by a Benedictine Centennial Colloquium.

Each prioress and delegate received a special centennial edition of *Benedictines* magazine, published by our sisters of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, who hosted our chapter gathering. It is a beautiful gathering of articles and photos about the past, present and future of us as North American Benedictines. We are grateful to *Benedictines* editor, Jennifer Halling and her staff, along with those on the centennial committees which helped pull it all together.

Clearly this was the work of many hands, minds and hearts. Thank you to Christine Ereiser (Tulsa) and her program planning committee for the centennial chapter! The theme they chose was: Radical Hospitality of the Heart: *El Camino de La Portera*. They invited excellent presenters to address us who are from our own congregation: Sister Judith Sutera (Atchison), monastic scholar and writer, and Sister Maricarmen Bracamontes (Torreón), internationally known theologian, prioress, and inspiring and challenging presenter to many Latin American audiences. It is impressive that we have this caliber of women in our monastic congregation.

The presentations were video recorded and available via link on the congregation website, under the Chapter tab.

Also presenting at the general chapter was Sister Judith Ann Heble on "Creating a Legacy." She told the story of her own monastery in Lisle, Illinois where they have planned well and are living into their "preferred future," a term that they often use. It was well received and appreciated by all the sisters, who could perhaps imagine their own communities doing the same kind of creative and good planning for the future.

We are grateful to our sister and friend, Jeanne Weber, OSB, president of the Federation of St. Gertrude, for leading the general chapter prioresses and delegates in our election discernment process. We elected a president and council members to serve us for the next four years.

Throughout the days of the general chapter, we had the opportunity to see the 100 years of history in an attractive, informative and creative display that was engineered by our very gifted congregation archivist, Elaine Nadeau. The display even had bar codes we could focus on with our phone cameras and receive, like magic, voices of our past congregation presidents as we came to their photos. It was a wonderful way to remember the gifts of the past, as we live in the present and look toward the future.

The planning team for the Colloquium was co-chaired by Linda Romey (Erie) and Elizabeth Brown (Glendora). Outstanding presentations were made. While it was originally to have been held in person immediately following the General Chapter, at the last minute it had to be converted to completely a virtual online experience due to a small outbreak of covid during the general chapter. There were over 200 in attendance online. Each of the 6 presentations and the 2 responses to each of the 2 days of presentations were rich and full, helping us to better understand and embody and live into the wisdom, witness, and way forward of our Benedictine tradition. Please see the notice within these pages of the recent publication of the book of the papers presented at the Colloquium: [Benedictine Life – A Vision Unfolding](#).

With former U.N. Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld, we say: "For all that has been, Thanks. To all that shall be, Yes."

CIB Conference of Delegates meeting in Rome September 2022

The CIB Conference of Delegates resumed its in-person worldwide meeting in early September 2022, held at the generalate house of the Tutzing Missionary Benedictines in Rome, Casa Spirito Santo. Delegates were present either in person or online from nearly all of the 19 regions of the world. Most were present in Rome with a number tuning in from their home monasteries each of the 4 days, on Rome time, via Zoom.

After introductions, we were pleased to have Sister Aquinata Böckmann, OSB, our sister and scholar on the Rule of St. Benedict with us. She makes her home in the monastery of the Tutzing Generalate house in Rome, so the trip to our



Sr. Aquinata Böckmann and Sr. Aileen Bankemper at Casa Spirito Santo, Rome 2022

meeting room was just down the hall for her! She remembered with us the early beginnings of CIB, meetings of which took place there at Casa Spirito Santo. We were grateful to have her joyful presence with us that is so indicative of her monastic good zeal.

We also welcomed Abbot Primate Gregory Polan who drove over from Sant' Anselmo to be with us and give us a report on the worldwide Benedictine Confederation. Abbot Gregory even came over early in the day to celebrate Mass with us and to join us for breakfast, before our meetings began at 9 a.m. We are most grateful for his brotherly presence with us.



Abbot Primate Gregory Polan addressing CIB Conference of Delegates, Rome 2022

We were also glad to welcome into our meeting, through the magic of Zoom, M. Klara Świdarska, the abbess of the monastery in Zhytomyr in Ukraine. We also had the helpful

presence of a Benedictine monk with us who could translate for both Mother Klara and for us as she spoke and shared with us about the too many months of the



M. Klara Świdarska of Ukraine and Fr. Jarek, translator, addressing CIB Conference of Delegates, Rome 2022

Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing bombing there, including bombing in the city where her monastery is. In fact, they had to flee their monastery, early in the war, and went to their foundation monastery near Lviv Ukraine (near the western border of Ukraine, next to Poland). However, most of the nuns have now returned to Zhytomyr, despite ongoing danger from Russian bombing. M. Klara expressed her gratitude for all who have helped to financially and prayerfully support them and their efforts in assisting the many refugees who have come to them seeking assistance. She said she has discovered in a new way what it means to be part of a worldwide communion of Benedictines and she is grateful.

Elections were held also during the CIB meetings. We were honored to have with us Brother Emili Turu, executive director of USG in Rome, as our discernment facilitator. Lynn McKenzie was re-elected as the Moderator, and Franziska Lukas (Germany) was also re-elected as the Assistant Moderator. Newly elected CIB Administrative Council members are Cecile Lañas (Philippines) and Maria del Mar Albajar i Viñas (Spain). Newly appointed CIB Administrative Council members are Anna Brennan (UK) and Hilda Scott (Australia). Their first in person meeting was held in Montserrat Spain in March 2023 at Monestir Sant Benet, home of council member Maria del Mar Albajar.



Newly elected Moderator and Administrative Council members (in person and online)

Link to CIB website with newly elected Administrative Council introductions:

[http://www.benedictines-cib.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Introduction to CIB Admin Team 2022.pdf](http://www.benedictines-cib.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Introduction%20to%20CIB%20Admin%20Team%202022.pdf)

## How Do We Begin to Plan for the Future, to Move Forward in Transition

Document available from Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI)

In the December 2022 News in Brief from RCRI, a very good, succinct resource is available to religious institutes undergoing change, which can be found here: [Fidelity to the Journey: Brief Guide for Institutes in Transition toward Historical Completion - Resource Center for Religious Institutes \(trcri.org\)](#). This means US! (Please note, you must log in to the RCRI website in order to access this document. If you have any problem accessing this, please contact Lynn McKenzie.)

In the introduction to this document, it states: "The challenge for each institute in transition is to identify the institute's needs, how best to address them together as an institute, and move forward in openness and honesty, and in faith and fidelity to the institute according to the 'spirit of the founder and sound traditions' (c. 576). . . The solutions for decreasing membership in the past, such as mergers and unions, are for some institutes no longer the preferred or ideal solutions. Today we look for new paths, new options that will address various issues especially those concerning the care of members, canonical governance, ministry, the institute's patrimony, and its legacy of service." There are five areas addressed and under each of these areas are included links to other resources available from RCRI and NRRO: **care of members, property, ministries, canonical governance and legacy.**

This document, together with the linked resources, could help your monastic community as you move forward in planning.



## The Resource Center for Religious Institutes

### FIDELITY TO THE JOURNEY

#### BRIEF GUIDE FOR INSTITUTES IN TRANSITION TOWARD HISTORICAL COMPLETION AND FULFILLMENT OF MISSION

*\*December 2022*



**THANK YOU TO CHERYL CHADICK,**

**Development and Communications Coordinator  
for our sisters at Holy Name Monastery in St. Leo, FL.  
She is the new designer/editor of the GYROVAGI.**

**Thank you also to the St. Leo community for sharing Cheryl's talents with us.**

## What's in a Name – a new title for our monastic congregation

At the Centennial General chapter held in Atchison, Kansas in June 2022, the prioresses and chapter delegates voted unanimously to officially change our title to match what our constitution says about us: the **Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica**. We will no longer be called the Federation of St. Scholastica, though that was our name since 1974.

Ahead of the chapter, materials were sent to the prioresses and delegates to read and consider. At the chapter, the president presented the prioresses and delegates with further explanation and a resolution to be considered by the chapter:

Be it resolved that we, the Chapter of the Federation of St Scholastica, acknowledging our juridic reality as a monastic congregation as noted in our constitution and in keeping with the proper title of Benedictine monastic congregations, do hereby approve the change of our official title from the Federation of St. Scholastica to the Monastic Congregation of St Scholastica and to make the necessary editorial changes in our constitution.”

Further, we authorize the President to make the necessary editorial changes in the proper law and other documents as required by the adoption of this resolution.

Further, we direct the President to give notification of the title change to whom it is proper and necessary.

This resolution was accepted by a unanimous vote of the chapter.

Since the time of the chapter the president sent a letter to the Vatican dicastery for institutes of consecrated life informing the dicastery of our name change and making clear our status as a monastic congregation. Changes to our title have been made to our website (website now: <https://www.monasticcongregations.org/>) and new stationery has been printed. [Please see other article herein about our new congregation logo.] The other U.S. monastic congregations were informed of this change. In fact, the next month after our chapter, the general chapter of the Federation of St. Benedict was held and they also changed their title to the Monastic Congregation of St. Benedict. The Federation of St. Gertrude will hold its general chapter in summer 2023 and this item of business of a name change is also on their agenda.

	<h3 style="text-align: center;">Upcoming Dates for President's Travel</h3> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>June 5th - 11th</td> <td>Atchison, KS - election of prioress</td> </tr> <tr> <td>June 11th - 17th</td> <td>Beech Grove, IN - general chapter of Federation of St. Gertrude</td> </tr> <tr> <td>July 2nd - 8th</td> <td>Clyde, MO - canonical visitation of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration</td> </tr> <tr> <td>July 17th - 23rd</td> <td>Norfolk, NE - 55 &amp; Under gathering of North American Benedictine women</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Aug 15th - 19th</td> <td>Aug 8th - 12th Dallas, TX for LCWR</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Aug 29th - 31st</td> <td>Washington, DC - give community retreat at St. Anselm Abbey (English Benedictine Congregation)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sept 2nd - 9th</td> <td>Conception, MO - Conception Abbey for meeting of the Synod Abbot Presidents to give CIB report.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sept 14th - 17th</td> <td>Cullman, AL - Meeting of CIB Administrative Council and CIB Conference Delegates</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sept 18th - 22nd</td> <td>Boerne, TX - canonical visitation at St. Scholastica Monastery</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sept 26th - 30th</td> <td>Erie, PA - Mount St. Benedict Monastery for oral history with past president Joan Chittister</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Oct 8th - 19th</td> <td>St. Louis, MO - annual conference of Resource Center for Religious Institutes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nov 16th—19th</td> <td>Tutzing, Germany - meeting of the Younger European Benedictine Women gathering (age 50 and under) and possible visits to other German monasteries</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nov 26th—Dec 7th</td> <td>Tulsa, OK - canonical visitation at St. Joseph Monastery</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Subiaco, Italy - annual meeting of the Council of AIM International and possible visits to other Italian monasteries</td> </tr> </table>	June 5th - 11th	Atchison, KS - election of prioress	June 11th - 17th	Beech Grove, IN - general chapter of Federation of St. Gertrude	July 2nd - 8th	Clyde, MO - canonical visitation of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration	July 17th - 23rd	Norfolk, NE - 55 & Under gathering of North American Benedictine women	Aug 15th - 19th	Aug 8th - 12th Dallas, TX for LCWR	Aug 29th - 31st	Washington, DC - give community retreat at St. Anselm Abbey (English Benedictine Congregation)	Sept 2nd - 9th	Conception, MO - Conception Abbey for meeting of the Synod Abbot Presidents to give CIB report.	Sept 14th - 17th	Cullman, AL - Meeting of CIB Administrative Council and CIB Conference Delegates	Sept 18th - 22nd	Boerne, TX - canonical visitation at St. Scholastica Monastery	Sept 26th - 30th	Erie, PA - Mount St. Benedict Monastery for oral history with past president Joan Chittister	Oct 8th - 19th	St. Louis, MO - annual conference of Resource Center for Religious Institutes	Nov 16th—19th	Tutzing, Germany - meeting of the Younger European Benedictine Women gathering (age 50 and under) and possible visits to other German monasteries	Nov 26th—Dec 7th	Tulsa, OK - canonical visitation at St. Joseph Monastery		Subiaco, Italy - annual meeting of the Council of AIM International and possible visits to other Italian monasteries
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**New Logo of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica**



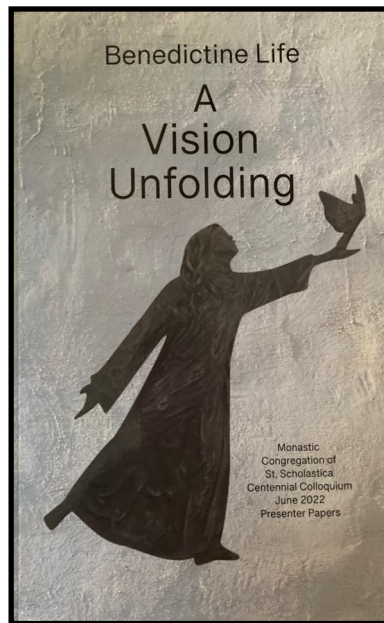
A big shout out to Newark DE Oblate, Anne Sanders, for designing our new congregation logo! Thank you, Anne! (And thank you to the sisters of St. Gertrude Monastery in Newark for introducing us to Anne and sharing her with us!) You will see this new logo featured not only here in this newsletter, but also on our website, and on our new congregation letterhead.

You will see that the image of St. Scholastica is what was used by the Atchison Chapter Coordinating Committee on keepsakes for the chapter delegates, like the cup that each received during the general chapter. You'll recall that this image is an adaption of the beautiful statue of St. Scholastica which is at Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman. (See photo below.) Sister Elisabeth Meadows, Cullman prioress and member of the Chapter Centennial Program Planning committee provides this description:

*The sculpture of St. Scholastica upon which the centennial logo is based is entitled "Release." Created by sculptor Leslie Hutto for the centennial of Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL, the 2002 work conveys a sense of energy, of forward movement, of stretching out into the future, of letting go into the grace of God that calls us, with the release of the dove like a giving of self. The Centennial Committee was drawn to this image, seeing in it a striding forward with purpose, a confident tension between motion and stability, an energy flowing from foot to hand. In their adaption they sought to modernize the look by revealing flowing hair under the veil and simplifying the sleeves, showing a positive tension between past and present. She is rooted in tradition but she is striding forward with openness to the new dream being born - releasing the grace within her, and releasing herself into grace.*



### New Book Published – Centennial Colloquium Papers Presented



Benedictine Life – a Vision Unfolding was recently published, thanks to the efforts of Sister Linda Romey of Erie. It was self-published through Lulu.com. We give thanks also to all of the presenters at our Centennial Colloquium which occurred immediately after the completion of our general chapter in June 2022. It is their presentations which are published in this book.

The book's dedication beautifully says:

*These papers and the wisdom they reveal,  
the witness they bring to light,  
and the vision they put forward  
are dedicated to those who have lived,  
those who are now living, and  
those who have yet to live  
the ever-unfolding Benedictine life.*

Our sister and friend (and former president of the Federation of St. Scholastica) Joan Chittister, OSB, wrote an introduction to this book entitled, "The Coming of the Next Centennial Depends on What We Learn from this One." In her introduction Joan asks why do we have a centennial celebration. She says it is, "To spur us to ask a new set of questions that can not only explain our past and shape our present but challenge our future as well." As Joan has always done, she challenges us to go forward, to be courageous, to face the questions even without knowing the answers.

This is an important book for us to have in our monastic libraries and to which to alert our Oblates and families and friends. One can imagine that the papers published in this new book would be an important resource for ongoing formation in our monasteries, to generate important conversations and dreaming into the future.

To order this new book, go to Lulu.com and under Bookstore, type in the title of the book: Benedictine Life – A Vision Unfolding. You will see it is available for \$14.95, a real bargain for this 136 page publication. Our congregation will benefit financially with each copy sold. Even more, our congregation will benefit with the reading and digesting of this book by each monastic, Oblate and friend of our communities and those seeking through Benedictine spirituality to find a meaningful way forward in their lives.



Archives for Gyrovagi Spring 2023—by Elaine Nadeau, congregation archivist



Mother Regina

The Monastic Congregation of Saint Scholastica has officially had ten Presidents. Their names are well known and have been repeatedly referenced leading up to the Centennial Chapter. But it would be remiss of us to forget the other women who had taken on the duties of the president when the need arose, but whose names and contributions have not been as well-known in the Congregation. Indeed, their presence in the official records of the Monastic Congregation are sparse to non-existent- a mere footnote in the collective history.

Mother Regina O'Donnell of Elizabeth New Jersey was the first visitator when Mother President Aloysia Northman died in 1924. Mother Lucy Dooley was not elected as the second president of the Congregation until 1926. The death of Mother President Aloysia "left the Congregation in a state of perplexity and anxiety."

In the almost two years in-between, Mother Regina held the reigns of a Congregation not yet well-established. Indeed, there was no instruction manual. In the few pages of correspondence that the archive has, Mother Regina inquired to Abbott Martin Veth of Atchison as to whether Mother Aloysia had had the Congregation seal made, as she would need to have for her reports on behalf of the Congregation, and whether there were any blanks or templates for the visitation reports. Seemingly, she was left to piece together the office of Mother President.

The state of the Congregation and the lack of understanding of the role of the Congregation by certain communities was a concern for her. She continued to hold visitations, of which one community refused to consent to. Visitations appear to have been her largest trial, and a task that she devoted much thought to. "I have very serious doubts that any Mother Prioress could with ease leave her Community for so long a time as it took us to make the rounds at the number of Houses we did visit. To do the work satisfactorily the anxiety connected with one's own community is a hinderance." Still, she reported, the prioresses and the communities seemed pleased with the results.

An informal meeting was held in 1925 to discuss the Congregation in light of Mother Aloysia's death. Prior to the meeting, to Abbot Martin she wrote, "I've refrained from writing to the Rev. Mothers about the meeting I proposed in my last letter to you- I did not know just what to call the meeting [...]. I shall be glad for your advice, since I'm not sure whether the right is mine to call the Mothers and if they should be asked to bring along a delegated sister." She continued that she wanted this informal meeting so that they may decide on the matters they'd like him to present to Rome. The meeting did occur and one point brought up was that the visitations have been begun with good results, and the Prioresses have found in them a help towards a more clearly defined course for the better observance of the Holy Rule and the Constitutions.



Mother Annunciata

Mother Regina was also the one to announce to Abbot Martin the application of Covington, LA to the Congregation, a matter that would be settled at the Chapter meeting in 1926. She initially presided at the General Chapter of 1926, until the election could be held. Mother Lucy Dooley was elected.

By the time 1950 rolled around, the Congregation was much better established and the running of the everyday matters was almost routine. Still, when Mother Lucy Dooley had a stroke and was unable to lead the 1950 General Chapter, the responsibility fell to Sister Annunciata Janeway of Cullman, Alabama. Sister Annunciata was an experienced Prioress, having been elected in 1920 and served until the election of Mother Mary Susan in 1953. We know less of the duties that she may have needed to take on. Mother Alfred Schroll was elected at this same 1950 meeting.

We can see that the correspondence after Mother Lucy's stroke was signed, and in many cases is indicated as having being written on her behalf, by Sister Augusta Parle, future prioress of Glendora California. We can also see that there were no visitations between 1947 and 1951, the years of Mother Lucy's fluctuating ill health and the initial year of Mother Alfred's term. During her most recent illness, the typical presidential correspondences and office duties were handled by the Mother President's secretary. Mother Lucy died in 1951.

While the records during these months before the General Chapter are virtually silent on the matter, it stands to reason that there were many hands involved in keeping things running smoothly. It is in these absences of records that the contributions of these women to the running of the Monastic Congregation are lost.