Angels at the Table: Our Retreat Center Cooks

Weekend retreats present a dual challenge to the sisters at St. Scholastica Retreat Center--to offer uplifting programs that nourish souls along with comfortable accommodations and good food served with generous doses of Benedictine hospitality. Sister Madeline Bariola, OSB, Director of Center Maintenance and Hospitality, relies on the culinary talents of her “angels at the table,” Scho Girls Virginia Ricketts, Dorothy Sullivan, Wilma Ahlert, Kitty Hug, Aggie Lensing, and others to prepare and serve the delicious meals that bring guests back year after year.

“People want to come back because of the meals they prepare,” Sister Madeline said. “We all get along so well; I love them like my sisters. They are absolutely the most gracious ladies and nothing is ever too much for them to do.”

The Scho Girls do it all--from menu planning to shopping to cooking and serving. “We don’t buy any pre-made food; we cook from scratch,” Virginia Ricketts said. “We usually cook as we go, and are starting on the next day’s breakfast before we’re even done cleaning up after dinner. We serve hot breakfasts--scrambled eggs, sausage, biscuits, and pancakes.”

Dorothy Sullivan and Virginia Ricketts, who coordinate the program, graduated from St. Scholastica Academy several years apart and became friends volunteering at Immaculate Conception Church on the Parish Life Commission. After cooking for numerous receptions and events at Msgr. Galvin Hall, it seemed only natural for them to start helping at the monastery during its 125th anniversary year, 2004. “We started working with Sister Jo Ann Senko and when Sister Madeline assumed kitchen duties we just pitched in and helped,” Sullivan said.

The unflappable pair has served as many as 58 people at the Benedictine Vocation Directors Retreat and weathered crises with equanimity. “Once we put ingredients for a cheese ball for 500 people into a big mixer and the cheese went flying all over the kitchen,” Ricketts laughed. But after years of volunteering together, they have learned how to finish one another’s thoughts--and clean up one another’s messes.

“There is a quote from Hebrews 13:2, ‘Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it,’” Sullivan said. And in the spirit of Paul’s words, “one of our Scho Girls has named our retreat cooks the “Angels at the Table Ministry.”"
“Most of the time,” was my quick response to the lay person’s question: “Do you enjoy being Prioress?”

In this message which will probably be my valedictory message in HORIZONS, I want to reflect on a few of the beauties and wonders of these past eight years. I’ll also take this opportunity to express my gratitude for all the support and collaboration I’ve experienced within the monastery itself and with the many lay people who believe this praying monastic community definitely needs a niche in the future church and society. AND, after almost 50 years, we need an answer to your and our prayers for new vocations. Read the article on our vocation efforts.

The big event which occurred in 2004 was the celebration of 125 years of existence and service in Arkansas and neighboring states since the Jan. 23, 1879, founding of St. Scholastica Convent, now Monastery, in Shoal Creek (New Blaine), Arkansas. This year we marked our 130th anniversary but with little fanfare.

God has been so good to us through gracious and generous people—yes, YOU—who responded to our expressed needs in the annual appeal letters. Review our very first annual report in this issue.

In addition, a remarkable number of people who love the good earth provided countless baskets of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially during the summer months. Volunteers of every age and specialty, especially the Alumnae and Oblates, gave us their precious time working at the retreat center and at the monastery. Note the article on our ‘angels at the table.’

Members of parishes where our Sisters taught for many years for little or no pay now proclaim their thanks by declaring it is ‘pay back time’. Our prayer and hope for each of you is that you are experiencing the full measure promised in Luke 6:38: "Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (New American Standard Bible)

I’m filled with gratitude for the lay men and women who serve selflessly on our four advisory boards: the Financial Advisory Board, initiated in the early 1970s; the Friends of the Center Advisory Board on Sept. 3, 2004; the Development Advisory Board Jan. 23, 2006, and the Vocation Advisory Board May 25, 2007. Their input has proved invaluable. We also have a great employee contingent of workers who genuinely care about the Sisters and their home.

The two terms I’ve served as Prioress of this community, 2001-2009, will come to an end when the as-yet-unknown Sister will be elected Apr. 19 and officially installed Thursday, May 28. Sister Joella Kidwell, OSB, former Prioress of Monastery of Immaculate Conception, Ferdinand, IN, and now president of the Federation of St. Gertrude to which St. Scholastica Monastery belongs, will preside at the installation during Mass. Bishop Anthony Taylor will be the presider for the Eucharist.

In preparation for the change of leadership our whole community will have been in a ‘discerning’ mode for almost a year and should be well prepared to allow the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts to select the person who will have the qualities specified in the Rule of Benedict to lead the Sisters on the monastic journey to God. Unlike the secular way of selecting a leader, there is no campaigning. Being the leader is not a prize to be sought, but as St. Benedict says in Chapter 64 on the “Election of an Abbot/Prioress”, the abbot/prioress must keep constantly in mind the nature of the burden (emphasis mine) he/she has received and remember to whom he/she will have to give an account of his/her stewardship (Luke 16:2).

To ease the ‘burden of the office’ of leadership, the wise person will choose to surround herself with officers whose talents and gifts will complement hers. Gratefully I acknowledge the staff who served with me some of the years since 2001: Sisters Rachel Dietz as sub-prioress; Audrey Becker, secretary-treasurer; Ginger deGravelle treasurer; and Gabriel Brandt, Christine Eckart, Regina Schroeder as procurator/purchasers, and Elizabeth Rossi, house coordinator. I’m deeply appreciative of their assistance in leading the community in the Benedictine way of life which includes prayer, work, study, and leisure. I am also indebted to each Sister who took leadership in the monastic council and the ongoing and various ad hoc committees.

I invite you to visit our web site at www.stscho.org as well as our monastery. You are in my prayers and in the prayers of the Sisters here.

–Sister Cabrini Schmitz, OSB
The Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery thank each of you, our benefactors and volunteers, for your generous support. You are remembered in our love and prayers. The first Monday of each month, a Mass is offered for you and your intentions.

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Our new, user-friendly website will have more news and features about the sisters.
Sister Regina and Maintenance Supervisor Ed Elkins work out details for our new phone system with Connect, Inc.

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Using only $425,000 (significantly less than in past years) from our continuing care fund, the monastery was able to balance the operating budget, thanks to the generosity of our benefactors. However, the value of our investment portfolio decreased substantially due to the economic crisis.

**Consider Your Call**

**St. Scholastica Monastery Monastic Experience**

**July 9-13, 2009**

This retreat weekend is open to young Catholic women between the ages of 18-45 who want to learn about Benedictine life. There will be times for prayer, ministry, getting to know the Sisters and participating in monastic life. For more information, contact our Vocation Director:

Sister Kimberly Rose Prohaska, OSB
St. Scholastica Monastery
P.O. Box 3489
Fort Smith, Arkansas 72913
(479) 783-4147
vocationdirector@stscho.org

**Hear Sister Kimberly on**

This January, Sister Kimberly Prohaska appeared on Marvin Fairchild’s “Hearing the Call” show, broadcast on KDUA, 96.5 FM, Rogers, AR. Out-of-area listeners can access her show on KDUA’s website, download her interview on their MP3 players, and even forward it to friends via e-mail. The link to Sister Kimberly’s interview is at http://paduamedia.com/Documents/Kimberly.mp3. Sister Kimberly has been invited back to tape shows with Marvin in the future.

Sister Kimberly’s Vocation Newsletter, “The Gatekeeper,” will share what has been happening in our vocation program since our last “Horizons.” Read “The Gatekeeper” in PDF format on our new website at www.stscho.org.

**Sisters of St. Scholastica Monastery spend time in Adoration and pray the Rosary daily for increased vocations to monastic life. Join them in prayer by cutting out this card, placing it in your Bible or prayer book, and reciting it each day:**

**BENEDICTINE PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS**

Loving and Inviting God,
We yearn for life and desire to see good days.
Awaken our hearts to your presence in the people and circumstances we meet each day.
May we take time to listen to your presence within us.
Bless your Church in love by raising up women and men of courage who will listen to your invitation to commit themselves to seeking and serving you in the Benedictine way of life.
May they, together with us, witness to your presence in the world.
In Jesus’ name we pray.
AMEN.
NEWS BRIEFS

On October 17, the three monastery bells that had been sitting on the monastery roof were removed and placed on a concrete slab on the north side of the monastery.

On October 17-19, Sister Rachel Dietz, OSB, Subprioress, led the Diocese of Little Rock’s annual Deacon’s Retreat at Subiaco.

On November 18-21, Ravi Thiagarajan, Chief Financial Officer, represented the monastery at a meeting of the National Association of Treasurers of Religious Institutes in Denver, CO.

In November, Sisters Kimberly Prohaska and Pat Bolling, OSB, did vocation work in and around Gonzales, LA. From January 28-February 5, Sisters Pat and Kimberly, joined by Sister Ginger de Gravelle, traveled to Lafayette, LA to promote religious vocations.

On January 23-25, Sister Rachel attended a Spiritual Direction Workshop at Mt. St. Scholastica, Atchison, KS.

On January 28-February 5, Sister Cabrini Schmitz, OSB, Prioress, attended the Benedictine Prioresses Conference in Cullman, AL.

Sister Rosalie Ruesewald, OSB, is currently attending a six-week intensive Spanish immersion program at MACC Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, TX.

On February 10, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor will make his first visit to the monastery and will celebrate the feast of St. Scholastica with the community.

This December, local artist John Bell, Jr. presented a numbered print of “St. Scholastica Monastery-Circa 1929.” The original oil on canvas painting is 22” by 36.” Bell has served on a special committee for the National Endowment for the Arts, owned and operated two studios and galleries, and worked as a commercial artist, church window designer, and furniture fabric designer. He continues to live and paint in his home town, Fort Smith, Arkansas.