

Norfolk Newsletter

March 2011

Missionary Benedictine Sisters
Immaculata Monastery & Spirituality Center

Easter Message from the Prioress Sr. Pia Portmann, OSB



Before this newsletter comes to you we will celebrate Easter. I found this picture of the disciples to Emmaus. They are shocked about the death of their master and are on the way to search for a new future. Shadowy vague something – one goes with them and fans a fire that promises warmth and light. The three of them go through hilly landscape with a wide horizon. The earthen colors seem like waste and hilly desert land. At the far horizon in the right corner of the picture light and dark rain play together. We don't know what the disciples will expect at the end of their way. It seems they are not worried about this. Important for them is that they are on the way with the unknown who let their heart burn within them. But in the manner in which the unknown breaks bread and talks with them they recognize him.

We, like the disciples of Emmaus walk, not recognizing that Jesus, the risen Lord, walks with us. As we prepare for our Priory Chapter we don't see yet where the way will lead us. But we know and believe that Jesus is walking with us and that His Holy Spirit will lead us into the future of the Norfolk Priory.

May we all open our hearts – no matter if we walk in the desert, darkness, rain or light. Jesus Christ is risen indeed, hallelujah! Shalom and a blessed Easter!

Sr. Pia Portmann, OSB

News from Winnebago

Sr. Frances Betz, OSB

Winter is over, the last snow has melted. March winds are sweeping the land. Somebody here already planted a row of potatoes while testing the readiness of the land for gardening. The robins are back in force, filling the early morning air with their love songs, but swallows must have sneaked in very quietly—if they have arrived yet.

Our mission director, Father David Korth is away for a two months' sabbatical and scheduled to return in time for Holy Week. This is the first sabbatical since his ordination 19 years ago. On February 13 he flew to Israel to attend the *Tantur Institute for Ecumenical Studies* on a campus situated on the main road from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Father shared some of his experiences and adventures via bulletin inserts with the parish. The director of the Institute is a Russian Orthodox priest, originally from Lincoln, NE. Together with the distinguished international lecturers and students he experienced many exhausting trips to biblical sites in Israel, Jordan, the Negev and the Sinai peninsula. We here expect

to be allowed to share these experiences in future homilies and lectures here. Father even surprised Duncan with a voice message via skype that sent the dog frantically searching in vain for his master all over the office and surroundings.

As has been the custom for many years, we sisters are participating in the ecumenical Lenten services in the area. On the third Sunday St. Augustine Church was host, with about 40 persons in attendance. Father Mike gave our protestant friends and ministers a taste of a Catholic service, with the occurring three readings from the Sunday lectionary, homily, intercessions, and music from the Heritage Missal. The organist was supplied by divine providence for this occasion. In the absence of our gravely ill choir director, Jerry LaMere, a college senior, music major from Homer who happened to attend our morning Mass that day was

recruited. The collection taken up at these services is for the food pantry sponsored by Northeast Nebraska Ministerial Association. This is located in St. Joseph's Rectory in Walthill, and aside from dire emergencies, is open on the last two Tuesdays and Thursdays of the month from 2-5 pm, served by various ministers in turn.

Adult education for parishioners is held on Wednesday evenings during lent. Father Mike is explaining the history and meaning of the different parts of the Mass and giving us a preview of the liturgical changes that will be introduced this advent.

We wish all our readers a joyous and grace-filled Easter

Two Afternoons at Sacred Heart School

Sr. Philomena Roche, OSB

We Sisters wanted to have some contact with the Students during Catholic Schools Week, January 31 – February 4, 2011. The afternoon of Thursday the 3rd. Sister Philomena arranged to visit the Kindergarten classes from 2:00 -- 3:00 p.m. She started her visits in Mrs. Hammond's classroom. The Children sat on the floor all around her while Sr. Philomena told them she had been born in New Zealand and how long she has been a Sister.

After this Sister asked them to tell her their favorite prayers. Some said the 'Hail Mary', some the prayer to their Guardian Angel and others the 'Our Father'. It was clear these Children were receiving good Religious instruction. Then Mrs. Hammond said she would read a story the Children liked for her read to visitors, called "The Enormous Watermelon" which was about several Nursery Rhymes.

After this Sister visited the two other Kindergarten classes where she was again well received. There are approx. 18 Students in each of the three Kindergarten classes.

The next afternoon, Friday, February 4th. eleven or twelve of us Sisters went to the school where all the Students were assembled in the cafeteria. The Principal, Mr. Troy Berryman made our Prioress, Sister Pia Portmann and all of us most welcome. Sister Jania Maria, who had taught for many years in this school, stood in front of the Students and led us Sisters singing simple Jesus songs. We ended the visit with a song of blessing, that God bless all these Children and their very zealous Teachers.



Vocation Ministry

Sr. Jania Maria Keogh, OSB

The Vocation Ministry has been very actively involved in getting the Missionary Benedictine Sisters name better known in the Omaha Archdiocese, as well as other locations in the past few months. Activities in which members have been involved include the Omaha Archdiocesan Youth Pilgrimage for March for Life in January; continuing growing the Missionary Benedictine Sisters of Norfolk, NE Facebook page; vocation visits in several cities in Nebraska, Iowa, and Missouri; a Missionary Benedictine Sisters T-shirt which people may obtain through a monetary donation; and continual contacts with young women. More events and vocation talks are planned during in the following months.



As far as vocation visitors go, Anna Vacha visited the Norfolk Priory for a week during March. Janis Sanchez will be coming for several days during Holy Week and Easter. Further contacts are being made with women who are discerning religious life.

From the Student's Desk

Inviolata Mukhaabi Shianzira

This semester has been full of activities in addition to my usual studies. There has been much happening around here and I think it needs to be shared. The semester started usually with the snow blowing so hard that we had classes cancelled too early on in the semester. That was as usual a double-edged sword: we don't have to be in class, but then we pay for it later as the professors try to jam everything together towards mid-term break. All in all it was a good start for me. The fact that it was my final semester made the going quite easy.

From a faith perspective, the Catholic Newman Club launched the small groups Bible study last semester across campus.

This semester I continued with my group of five. I have this wonderful group of ladies who are just so enthusiastic about their faith and bible study. They are all Volleyball players, yet with all the tight schedules involving sports and classes, they are still committed to the bible study. They are a responsible and accountable group. If something comes up and they can't make it, they discuss the alternatives and then give me a call. So far our topics for this

semester have been about defending the Catholic faith. They wanted to know how to back up their Catholic faith with scriptures, so we ended up doing some apologetics. Actually this has made me learn more than I knew since I grew up in a solid Catholic environment and I never had anybody question my faith. Yet in today's world, these young people have to deal with crises of defending themselves and their faith especially on college campuses.

From a cultural perspective, I am a member of the International Club at Wayne State College. This club comprises of members from across all available cultures on campus. We have other clubs like the German Club, the Spanish Club, the United Students of Africa (USA) and the like which usually take part in the International Dinner event. The International Dinner is hosted by the International Club and its main objective is to appreciate diversity at Wayne State College by offering a variety of cultural foods and entertainment. February 26th (6:00pm – 9:00pm) was the International Dinner this year and we had different foods from different cultures e.g. Sambusas (African), German meatballs, Mexican rice, Enchiladas, Nepali tea, etc. To cap the evening, there were dances from different cultures as well. We had a French dance, an Irish dance, an African dance, a German song, fashion show, and Nepal song. For the past two years the Native American Lewis has always performed the Hoop Dance. Everyone was expecting this dance only we did not get it. Instead, we got the Grass Dance, which was a change to the diet but it was okay.

From a civic perspective, over spring break (March 5-12), I joined a group of students to Texas for a service learning trip. The trip was coordinated by the Newman Club in conjunction with the Multicultural Center at Wayne State. Like any other service learning trip, the purpose of this trip was to learn more about issues affecting the society by immersing oneself into the daily lives of people in a given setting. The Texas trip took us to Laposada Providencia (the Inn of Providence), a shelter for people in the process of seeking legal asylum status in the United States. The home is being run by the Sisters of Divine Providence, headquartered in St. Louis Missouri. It was just different. With immigration a hot topic in the U. S. at the moment,

this gave the group a different perspective of looking at the immigration laws and the ongoing debate both on the national and state levels. Our life during this one week involved helping clients with English classes, listening to their stories, and working with them in the day-to-day activities. Clients were from different countries: Bangladesh, Columbia, Mexico, Cuba, and... with most of them in their late teens and early twenties. Listening to their stories was just unbelievable! It is just amazing what price people are willing to pay for freedom or a better life. I kept thinking that most of us have been born with all these privileges and we take them for granted, yet for some people they don't know what those privileges look like. One lesson I drew at the end of this one week was that the next time I find myself complaining about life, I will remind myself that there are worse situations than mine, and for people in those situation, complaining is not even a choice!



Within this one week, we were also able to visit the International Education Services center, which houses children picked up by the border patrol or children illegally present in the United States. The center is set up like a school, which means the teens have a wide range of classes. Practically, everything the children want or need is within the center, and so they don't get out. It is more like a detention center, only more humane. The director was very good and we learned a lot from that one hour visit. We also visited with the Pro Bono service providers for the illegal immigrants. These are the attorneys who represent the immigrants in the legal

procedures of securing status in the U.S. or at least they advise the immigrants on the available options. We also visited the Shrine of Our Lady of San Juan of the valley, and that is where I discovered that San Benito (Spanish) is St. Benedict. I just never connected the two. Why did this strike me? It is because the town we were staying in was San Benito, Texas. One of the exciting moments was the visit to the Mexican border. With all the violence along the U.S.-Mexico border, this was a fragile arrangement. I went as far as the border but I did not cross into Mexico. I had my papers with me, but I feared that if I left I might not get back into the US, since I changed my status while in the US. The other Students were daring enough to cross over, but of course they were Americans. One, however, didn't have the Birth Certificate and she crossed over and was almost detained on their way back. I think what saved her was the group since they were all wearing the same T-shirts with Wayne State College on them. That was quite scary! Thank God she came back. It would have been hard trying to explain that one student was detained in Mexico! On a lighter note, since it was spring break and students end up on South Padre Island, TX during the spring break, we were not immune to the idea. We ended up on the beach and being the first time for me, it was fun, even though I am still afraid of much water around me. Overall the trip was a **long** trip. It is approximately 25 hours from Wayne, Nebraska to San Benito, Texas. We made the trip in two days factoring in the sightseeing and meal and gas stops. However exciting the experience, I was ever so glad to be back home Saturday evening especially since I had a presentation due on Monday. I give my heartfelt thanks to Sr. Pia and the Norfolk Priory for making it possible for me to be part of this trip.

Finally on March 19th, I was part of the WSC Newman team that offered confirmation retreat to 30 7th, 8th, and 9th graders in Lyons and Bancroft, Nebraska. The day was a success and I felt the Holy Spirit ran the show. It was a full day, starting at 8:30am till 7:00pm. The students were so energetic and just so disposed for the retreat. We grouped

Wayne State College
Class of 2011

them into five groups, each bearing the name of one of the five gospels. Yes, five.....because the Acts of the Apostles in the “gospel of the Holy Spirit”. The day was fun and serious simultaneously. Of course I had to take the Safe Environment Training before I could take part in the retreat. It is more like guidelines on what you should/should not do when you are with children in the church’s environment. I think this ends my escapades for this semester and the big event I am looking forward to is my graduation on May 7th. Come one, come all. God bless you all.

Graduation & Reception
May 7th 2011
@ 2:00PM

Priory Comings and Goings

Some very momentous happenings occurred around the Norfolk Priory in January. The MBS Oblates held a Tea for the Sisters on January 9, to support the sisters. We were able to visit with our prayer partners who were present.

Sr. Veronica Therese Willaway returned from a six-week home leave on January 13th. It was also on this day that Sr. Ann Terese Dana’s mother donated her 1995 Chevy car to the priory. It surely is nice to have the car for our student, Sr. Fidelis Marie. She uses it every day to get back and forth from Northeast Community College.

Of course on the Feast of Maur and Placid, the Juniors had lots to do, as it is our custom that they do all the table serving, reading, prayer leading, etc. Those sisters on the Formation Team were able to help them too.



On January 19, 2011, we celebrated the 90th birthday of our dear Sister Alberta. Of course we all sang the birthday song, ate Dairy Queen ice cream cake, and celebrated her life and ministries.

The employees of Immaculata Monastery were given a treat too, on January 19, finally giving them their Christmas party, having had been postponed from earlier in December because of WEATHER.

Fr. Tom Grieson of Omaha was here on Saturday, January 29, and gave a presentation on “Living as a Mary in a Martha’s World.” His whole talk focused on the appropriate attitude, bringing solitude and prayer into our ministries and work place.

Some sisters attended a workshop in Yankton, SD on February 4, but were home in time to begin the Community Days which took place Feb. 4-6. This was a time for us to have some time to prepare for the Priory Chapter which takes place May 26-29, 2011.

On the Feast of St. Scholastica, February 10, the Schuyler Monks came to celebrate Vespers with us and also have supper with the community.



In the photo is Sr. Monica Backes, Fr. Thomas Leitner, and Sr. Madeleine Miller.

On Sunday, February 13, Sunday, our community attended the 9:30am Mass at St. Mary's Church, where we were given great recognition and loving gratitude for MBS ministry in this area. After the Mass, the SERRA club (promoting vocations) had us over to the Parish Center for rolls and coffee.

We sisters got together with the employees on Valentine's Day, Feb. 14, for noon meal (catered from Subway) to honor Sr. Marie Andre Shon, who is taking some time off from her duties as Treasurer and employee supervisor.

Sr. Pia Portmann left on February 16 to attend the Benedictine Abbots and Prioresses meeting in Jacksonville, Florida. While there she was able to promote the Intensive RB course of Sr. Aquinata, which the Norfolk Priory will host in June, 2012. Also Sr. Pia took some time to visit the monastery in St. Leo while in Florida.

A new addition to St. Anne's Quilting room, arrived on the 17th, the feast of St. Patrick. Those sisters who do top quilting, will enjoy the new quilting machine.

Along with other communities in the Archdiocese of Omaha, Sr. Catherine Schiltmeyer, and Sr. Gabrielle Marie Oestreich represented our community, giving information about us to Archbishop Lucas on February 21st. He is fairly new to the Archdiocese, and wanted to get to know his religious communities.

Fr. Michael Patella of St. John's Collegeville, gave a presentation in Yankton on Feb. 26, at which several of our sisters attended.

March 1st brought Sr. Kevin Hermesen's sabbatical year to a close. She arrived with many experiences in the poor areas of the Bahamas. She spent 6 months with the Benedictine Sisters there, after some time with the sisters in Lacy, Oregon, and with family. We welcome her back now, as our new Development Director.

From Argentina came dear Sr. Veronica Pietro on March 4. She is a delight to have in the sewing room, and in our juniorate. Welcome, Sister!

Donna Kurgan, a lay volunteer, was here for the week of March 12-20. She is a 4th grade teacher in Phoenix, AZ, and used her spring break to help in our library. Donna has helped us out several times in the past, as well.

On March 16th Sr. Pia and several of the sisters invited lay people of the area for an evening of "Lectio Divina". This ministry will continue on the Wednesdays evenings of Lent.

Sr. Gabrielle Marie and Sr. Carole Ann went to Lincoln, to the National Quilt Day exhibition at the UNL Quilt Museum, March 19. There were artistic quilts displayed as well as "cord quilting" which dated back to the 18th century. Very interesting.

Upcoming events: 24th Priory Chapter in Norfolk will be from May 24th through May 30th. The theme is: "Recall the Vision, Embracing the Dream". We ask our sisters all over the world to help us pray for fulfillment of the DREAM.



Norfolk Priory will have canonical visitation in July, the 8th – 25th. We welcome Sr. Adeleida and Sr. Therese.

Norfolk Priory Newsletter printed quarterly. Next issue will be June 2011.