



# harmony

*though many we are one*

## *Sister Mary Sophia makes final profession*

Benedictine Sister Mary Sophia Becker made her final monastic profession July 21 at the congregation's monastery in Tucson, Ariz.

However, throughout her journey of discernment, the road has been full of bumps, bruises, obstacles, questions and conversations with the Lord.

After a teaching career that spanned almost two decades, Sister Mary Sophia began to wonder if her life was destined for something beyond the classroom walls. Now, years later, she wonders if perhaps it was a destiny that had called earlier in life but hadn't realized it at the time.

So she went on to earn a degree in special education from Vanderbilt University and a master's degree in elementary education from the University of New Mexico. She spent most of her career in classrooms in Albuquerque and later served as an administrator of a large middle school's special education department.

Teaching was her life – it defined her – so it came as quite a shock to friends and family when the 30-something professional announced she was making a drastic change in her life.

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*Sister Mary Sophia Becker*

**“These are holy, spirit-filled, faithful women who understand that even through struggle there is hope. It’s an honor to be called to this life.”**  
*- Sr. Mary Sophia Becker*



**Volunteers and participants in the Summer Adventure discovered connections among the Gospel, social justice issues and earth spirituality.**

## *Wyoming adventure makes connections*

The majestic Big Horn Mountains served as a backdrop to the inaugural Summer Adventure of Prayer and Service in June at the San Benito Monastery in Dayton, Wyo.

The event, sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters and Earth Hope, invited its 17- to 18-year-old participants to pitch tents under the Western sky and discover connections among the Gospel, social justice issues and earth spirituality.

The weeklong program included hiking and learning about the geology of the Big Horn Mountains, painting in nearby Tongue River Canyon, learning about Northern Cheyenne and Crow traditions, service activities with the Benedictine Sisters, and reflections by Sister Helen Prejean, CSJ, author of the novel that inspired the award-winning movie, “Dead Man Walking.”

“For me, the camp inspired a reverence for the earth,” said Meredith Stoops from Kansas City, Mo. “Everything I learned and experienced led me to love the earth and work to protect it. I especially liked learning about the Native Americans. They loved the earth and that love influenced every decision they made.”

“I enjoyed getting in touch with nature again and feeling in awe of the incredible universe God has put us all in,” Vocation Director Sister Ruth Starman, OSB said. “The camp is definitely something we’ll sponsor again next summer.” †



## Upcoming Monastic Celebrations

**Postulancy Entrance**  
Clarisa Cutaia, August 3

**Novitiate Entrance**  
Nancy Gucwa, August 3

**First Profession**  
Sarah Miller, August 4

**60th Jubilee**  
Sister Kathleen Gorman, October 5

**Golden Jubilee**  
Sister Monica Sanders, October 5  
Sister Josetta Grant, October 6

Listen to live recordings of the Liturgy of the Hours and the Sisters' reflections online



[www.MonasteryPodcast.org](http://www.MonasteryPodcast.org)

## Final profession

*Continued from page 1*

"I didn't feel fulfilled, something was missing," she said.

Her friends assumed she would enter a teaching community, but Sister Mary Sophia kept an open mind. This strategy led her to a monastic summer experience sponsored by the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Mo.

"I loved the idea of experiencing a community with no strings attached," she said. However, when she arrived at the congregation's motherhouse in northwest Missouri she quickly felt she'd made a mistake.

"I arrived on a Saturday and by Sunday evening I was pacing the halls begging Sisters to give me something to do," she laughed. "But they just told me to relax and enjoy the quiet."

It worked because when the other participants returned home, Sister Mary Sophia stayed a bit longer.



**Sister Mary Sophia Becker offers herself to God during the suscipe of her final monastic profession in the Tucson monastery chapel.**

"The Sisters had touched my heart," she said.

She entered the postulancy in 2001 and struggled with the transition to religious life. However, she continued on her path, entered the novitiate but then hit a "spiritual brick wall."

"I decided to go home," she said. "I didn't feel ashamed about leaving. I just didn't understand why."

It was during Christmas

Eve Mass at her former church that she saw the light. She had only been absent from the parish for a year but realized even though the church was packed that night, she recognized only a handful of people.

"I came to realize my deepest desire – which is God's will – was to return to community and continue surrendering to God's love," she said. "I knew God was

giving me a choice that night, and I made the choice to come back."

She had only been absent from the monastery for six weeks, but that short time felt like an eternity when she faced the Sisters.

"It was hard to tell them I was leaving but even harder to tell them I was coming back and to know that my leaving was very painful for them," she recalled. "But there has been no doubt in my heart since then. In difficulties, there is growth. These are holy, spirit-filled, faithful women who understand that even through struggle there is hope. It's an honor to be called to this life." †

To read the complete feature on Sister Mary Sophia, check out the Sept/Oct issue of *Spirit & Life* at [www.SpiritandLifeMagazine.com](http://www.SpiritandLifeMagazine.com)



## Celebrating the Lord's call

### *Novice takes next step with first profession*



*Sister Mary Anselma Miller*

Sister Mary Anselma (Sarah) Miller, OSB made her First Monastic Profession during a ceremony on Aug. 4 in the Adoration Chapel in Clyde.

She earned her undergraduate degree from Colby College (Maine) and a master's degree from the University of Chicago's Divinity School before entering in 2004. She is originally from Cleveland, Ohio.

A feature spotlighting her will appear in the October issue of *Harmony*. †

### *Postulant makes entrance into Benedictine novitiate*



*Novice Nancy Gucwa*

Novice Nancy Gucwa entered into the Benedictine novitiate during a ceremony on Aug. 3 in Clyde.

The New York native entered in 2006 after a successful career in the banking and financial industry.

She was a member of the first graduating class that admitted women to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

A feature spotlighting Novice Nancy will appear in the October issue of *Harmony*. †

### *Newest member becomes postulant*



*Postulant Clarisa Cutaia*

Clarisa Cutaia, from Metairie, La., has been accepted as a postulant and entered into the Benedictine Sisters during a ceremony on Aug. 3 in the Adoration Chapel in Clyde.

Postulant Clarisa, who participated in the Sisters' annual Spring Break Experience has a background in early childhood development.

A feature spotlighting Postulant Clarisa will appear in the October issue of *Harmony*. †

### *Sister observes Silver Jubilee*



*Sister Sean Douglas*

Sister Sean Douglas, OSB observed her Silver Jubilee of monastic profession on July 29.

Originally from Milwaukee, Wisc., she takes St. Benedict's decree on the importance of prayer and work to heart.

She oversees maintenance of her monastery in Clyde and is also the catalyst behind the Benedictine Sisters' podcast and E-card Web sites. The Sisters will honor her milestone on Nov. 1. †

### *Chorale performs classics in chapel*

Members of the Nodaway Chorale community chorus performed in concert in June in the Adoration Chapel in Clyde.

Their invitation-only concert, which included music by Mozart, Handel, Michael Haydn and Gabriel Faure, was followed by a reception where Sisters mingled with the chorale's performers and benefactors. †



### Learn more about the Benedictine Sisters online

Main Web site - [www.BenedictineSisters.org](http://www.BenedictineSisters.org)

Shop online - [www.MonasteryCreations.com](http://www.MonasteryCreations.com)

Listen to prayer services -  
[www.MonasteryPodcast.org](http://www.MonasteryPodcast.org)

Send an E-card - [www.MonasteryNotes.org](http://www.MonasteryNotes.org)

*Spirit&Life* - [www.SpiritandLifeMagazine.com](http://www.SpiritandLifeMagazine.com)

## Tractors cruise through Clyde for charity

The Clyde monastery served as the lunch stop for the Heart of America Tractor Club's fund-raiser for Camp Quality in June.

More than 231 tractors participated in the annual cruise that raised \$25,000 for the camp, which provides activities and motivational opportunities for children living with cancer.

Tractors representing makes and models of years stretching back to the early 1900s paraded along highways throughout Nodaway County. Drivers garnered pledges and individual sponsors to help raise funds for the worthy cause.

When the cruise reached the monastery, they were met by Sister Sean Douglas, OSB who hopped on the Sisters' vintage John Deere tractor and met the participants at the top of cemetery hill to lead the parade to the picnic grounds out by the barns.



The local high school's FFA group arrived early to set up tables and to hand out sack lunches they had prepared for the drivers.

"Several people brought lawn chairs and sat out by the pond watching the tractors parade in," Sister Lynn D'Souza, OSB said. "Our Sisters were lined along the drive and on the refectory porch enjoying every tractor that came through. There were probably close to 400 people in attendance."

After a couple of hours, the participants left to continue on their route as the Sisters waved good-bye.

"Many thanked us for the hospitality, and we were happy that we could do it," Sister Lynn said. "It was a good day and good people out for a good cause and that made for a very good time." †

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31970 State Highway P  
Clyde, MO 64432-8100  
660/944-2221

**Publisher**  
Prioress General  
Sr. Ramona Varela

**Editor**  
Kelley Baldwin  
Director of Communications

**Editorial Board**  
Sr. Virginia Anne Argenziano  
Sr. Kathleen Gorman  
Sr. Bede Luetkemeyer  
Sr. Colleen Maura McGrane  
Sr. Gladys Ruth Noreen

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If you would like to subscribe to this free publication, please e-mail Kelley Baldwin at [kelley@bspa.us](mailto:kelley@bspa.us).

Please send all correspondence to Kelley Baldwin at [kelley@bspa.us](mailto:kelley@bspa.us).

## Summer Monastic event provides no-strings experience

They were invited to slow down and experience the balance of life.

And that's just what several young women did during this year's Summer Monastic Experience, which took place in July at the monastery in Clyde.

The weeklong event invited women to explore monastic life and Benedictine traditions with no strings attached.

Among the program's activities were monastic life sessions, how to weave Benedictine practices into their daily lives, working with various departments throughout the community and socializing with the Sisters.

The program gives young women of any faith options for their future, a short refuge from busy schedules and the chance to share with others thinking about religious life.

The congregation is unique among other Benedictine communities because the Sisters observe a certain amount of enclosure for their contemplative life and work within monastery walls but leave for educational



Previous participants enjoy the monastery's peaceful atmosphere.

opportunities, conferences and recreation. They are permitted home vacations and visits from friends and family.

For more information about the Summer Monastic Experience or its companion event, the Spring Break Monastic Experience, contact Sister Ruth Starman, OSB at [vocation@benedictinesisters.org](mailto:vocation@benedictinesisters.org) or visit [www.benedictinesisters.org](http://www.benedictinesisters.org) and click on Vocations. †

## Ground breaks on wind farm project

This summer, the Benedictine Sisters got one step closer to harnessing wind as an energy source to provide power to thousands of homes.

Work has begun on the wind farm project, financed by Wind Capital Group, near the Benedictine monastery in Clyde. The Sisters will host one of 24 turbines to be constructed in the area.

The \$75 million, 50.4-megawatt project will involve more than two dozen turbines hosted by about 20 Nodaway County landowners. According to Wind Capital Group's

Senior Vice President for Development and Operations Dean Baumgardner, the 7,000-acre wind farm will generate power to more than 30,000 homes.

Other environmentally friendly programs the Benedictine Sisters practice include the use of biodegradable packing materials for altar bread shipments, recycling and composting, and restoration of native prairie grasses.

These efforts captured the interest of *Hallmark* magazine, which visited the Clyde monastery for several days in June as part of an article they will include in an upcoming issue. †



Sister Cheryl Morehead (left photo) looks over the site (center) where part of the area's newest wind farm is being built near the Clyde monastery. The Sisters will host one of the 252-foot-tall turbines, which includes a 13-foot-wide base (right photo).

## Stage sister helps out real Sisters

The star of a one-woman interactive comedy show recently used her performances to raise money for the Tucson monastery.

Nonie Newton-Breen has spent the past six years on stage as Sister in the highly successful stage comedy, "Late Nite Catechism 2: Sometimes We Feel Guilty Because We Are Guilty."

Before her Tucson appearance, her mother, a local resident, sent her a newspaper article about the Tucson monastery and asked if she could do something to help.

After visiting the monastery with her mother and meeting the Sisters, Newton-Breen decided she could. So at the end of each Tucson performance, she

invited her audience to help some "real nuns" and ultimately raised more than \$8,000 for the monastery.

Any woman religious who attended the performances was admitted free and found the show hilarious, but respectful and in very good taste, Sister Lenora Black, OSB said.

"The additional bonus (to performing) has been to raise funds and awareness for retired religious Sisters," Newton-Breen said. "It has been such a treat to meet so many marvelous Sisters who work hard to care for the needy."

For more information about Newton-Breen's show, log onto [www.funnynun.com](http://www.funnynun.com). †



Actress Nonie Newton-Breen recently raised more than \$8,000 for the Tucson monastery during her performances in "Late Nite Catechism 2."

## *Sand Springs Sisters attend blessing ceremony for new gardens*

In keeping with the Benedictine tradition to support good stewardship of the earth, several Sisters of the Sand Springs community attended a blessing ceremony in May. The event was highlighted by the appearance of members of the Osage Tribe who were on hand to bless the land for the new Oklahoma Centennial Botanical Gardens.

The 300-acre, \$40 million project is located 10 minutes outside Tulsa and is scheduled to open later this year as part of the state's centennial celebration.

Among the site's features will be an America the Beautiful Garden, Cultural Gardens of the Orient and Mexico, a Children's Garden, Shade and Winter gardens, chapel, visitor center with classrooms, a 19-acre lake and outdoor amphitheater. †



## *Conferences and Workshops*

### **Benedictine Days**

Sisters Katherine Ann Smolik and Mary Anselma (Sarah) Miller, joined by Novice Nancy Gucwa, attended Benedictine Days in June in Yankton, S.D.

### **Conference of American Benedictine Prioresses Renewal Program**

Sisters Virginia Anne Argenziano and Mary Cecilia Rose Sprekelmeyer attended the summer month-long program in Rome. Topics included "Mapping the Geography of the Soul" and "Getting in Touch with the Person of Benedict in the Social, Political and Ecclesiastical Context." The program also provided many opportunities for travel, including visits to Monte Cassino and Subiaco, considered the cradle of the Benedictine Order and home to the Abbey of St. Scholastica.

### **Western North Carolina Annual Conference (United Methodist Church)**

Sister Dawn Annette Mills led a one-day retreat, "Prayer, Scripture and Imagination," as part of the Western North Carolina Annual Conference for United Methodist clergy in June at Lake Junaluska, N.C.

### **Scripture Classes**

Sisters at the Tucson monastery took part in Scripture classes led by Father Bart Hutcherson, OP in June.

### **Monastic Institute 2007**

Sister Sarah Schwartzberg presented a talk on hospitality in the Biblical tradition in July at the School of Theology of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn. The Monastic Institute provides continuing education and spiritual enrichment for American monastics and others interested in monastic spirituality and practice. Sister Sarah also serves on the board of directors for the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. †

## *Upcoming lay events*

### **Fall Oblate Retreat**

Clyde, Mo. ♦ September 28-30, 2007  
jeanfr@bspa.us

### **Monastic Spring Break Experience**

Clyde, Mo. ♦ March 2008  
vocation@benedictinesisters.org

### **Ruben Habito Sesshin Retreat**

Sand Springs, Okla. ♦ April 10 - 14, 2008  
osagemonastery@juno.com

### **Bede Griffiths Mahasamadhi Celebration**

Sand Springs, Okla. ♦ May 17-18, 2008  
osagemonastery@juno.com