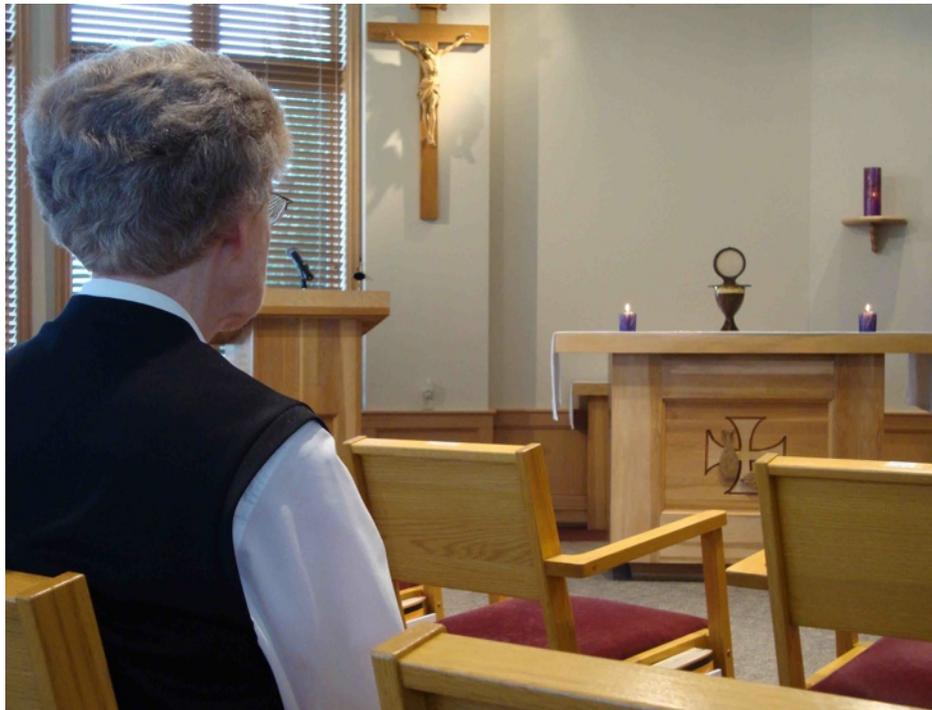




# BENEDICTINE SISTERS OF PERPETUAL ADORATION

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**Benedictine Sisters celebrate renovation and renewal during Lent**



Benedictine Sister of Perpetual Adoration Mary Audrey Jones participates in her community's expanded Lenten hours of the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in the monastery's chapel at Our Lady of Rickenbach.

**CLYDE, Mo.** – Halfway through a major renovation project, the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Mo., have embraced the opportunity to use this time as one dedicated to reflection and renewal.

“Lent is a season of renewal, echoing spring’s mandate to renew the soul and refurbish our inner, spiritual lives,” Sister Dawn Annette Mills, OSB said. “This has been a perfect opportunity for us to ask ourselves questions about how to renew our monastic life in spiritual and material ways.”

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With a devotion to the Blessed Sacrament that dates prior to her entrance in 1941, Benedictine Sister Mary Bertilla Seiffert is grateful for the additional time spent before the Blessed Sacrament during Lent.

The multi-million dollar project includes the deconstruction of an unused portion of the main house, with the removed sections dating back to the mid-1910s, and the installation of a geothermal heating and cooling system, renovation of bedrooms and baths, increased access to technology for continuing education and new infrastructure for plumbing and electrical systems. It also includes a new front entrance, which has the Sisters especially excited.

“The Rule of St. Benedict instructs that we treat each guest as if he or she were Christ himself,” Sister Dawn Annette said. “So hospitality is a large part of our life, one that we enjoy sharing with visitors and guests of all ages.”

The renovation will include a large parking area to accommodate tour buses but will lack one thing the previous entrance presented. Stairs.

“Lots and lots and lots of stairs,” Sister Dawn Annette groaned. “Dozens of them. The long climb was certainly unsettling to some, so we look forward to a new entrance on one level that will better mirror our hospitality.”

Beginning last spring, the Sisters moved furniture and other supplies out of the Marian Wing, the section of the

main house slated for deconstruction. To keep down costs, they did most of the work themselves, including the removal of wood flooring, nails, fixtures and hardware.

“As Benedictines, our way of life is one that embraces our role as stewards of God’s earth,” Sister Sophia Becker, OSB said. “Because of that, we made every effort to recycle as much as we could to use in the new construction or to donate to neighbors and community groups. It was our goal to keep as much stuff out of the landfill as possible.”

While no changes will be made to the Sisters’ Adoration Chapel, completed in 1911, the doors have been closed due to its proximity to the construction.

“It was difficult to do that, saying goodbye - albeit temporarily - to our prayerful space,” Sister Sophia said. “Also, it has been hard to turn away guests and friends during this time. As always, we continue to hold them warmly in our prayers and look forward to the day we can open our doors once again to our friends.”

In the meantime, the Sisters spend their community prayer times in the chapel of Our Lady of Rickenbach, their healthcare facility for the older members of the Congregation, and in a makeshift space carved out of a large meeting room in a nearby building.

“Staying centered during this time of displacement is vital to our community life,” Sister Dawn Annette said. “People were moved into smaller rooms, rooms that weren’t designed as bedrooms, some spaces converted to office and bedroom areas. We don’t have a proper place for everything right now because everything doesn’t have a place!”

It is because of that feeling of displacement the Sisters are exceptionally committed to their community life, one that includes coming together four times each day to pray the Divine Office and for daily Eucharist.

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“Sisters spend their days in different buildings right now, depending on their jobs and where their private rooms are located,” Sister Dawn Annette said. “Only our prayer and meals bring us all together, so those are precious, nurtured times to be together before God.”

The Sisters are paying for a bulk of the project (almost 80 percent) through savings and revenue earned from their production of altar breads, also known as communion wafers. The remaining cost will be funded by donations and bequests.

“As with anyone renovating a home, a project of this size can be daunting, both from a financial perspective and a personal one,” Sister Dawn Annette said.

The Sisters discussed the idea of renovating the monastery for many years. Dozens of meetings, retreats led by impartial facilitators and private prayer led to their decision to make this change, knowing it wouldn’t be an easy one. However, with the main house dependent on propane for heating and with large spaces not being used, the Sisters knew *not* doing anything was *not* a solution to their problems.

“Utility costs will only continue to rise, and it killed us to know how much fuel we needed and the strain it placed on our earth’s natural resources,” Sister Dawn Annette pointed out. “Also, with an old generator that couldn’t keep up with demand, uneven floors, an antiquated fire protection system and an elevator installed in the 1950s, we knew our Sisters’ safety must come first.”

It was those problems the Sisters took into account during their discernment process. In addition, they discussed how a large renovation like this would serve their multi-generational community both today and in the future.

“Benedictines take vows of obedience, stability and *conversatio*,” Sister Dawn Annette said. “The idea of *conversatio* is not about just striving to do better because *all* Christians must do that. Instead, it is about how to change *my* way to *our* way as a community. Changes are based on what the community thinks is better for the whole.”

In addition to making decisions about the physical changes to their monastery, the Sisters also discussed how they want to live in it. They critiqued the values of monastic silence and solitude, adoration, intercession and how best to build up and support their way of life.

From those discussions, the Sisters decided to increase the hours of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament during Lent and increase the amount of private adoration time.

“We decided what spiritual behaviors were most important to us and made a promise to bring those into the new monastery,” Sister Dawn Annette said. “We are a group of individuals loving each other not in spite of our differences, but because of them.”

The renovations should be completed in late summer, and the Sisters count down the days until they move from their makeshift rooms in separate buildings back together under one roof.

“It is an exciting time as we look forward, not only to a renewed monastery, but also to our renewed life,” Sister Dawn said.

*To learn more about the project, please contact Sister Dawn Annette at (660) 944-2221 or [dawn@benedictinesisters.org](mailto:dawn@benedictinesisters.org) or log onto the Sisters’ blog at <http://www.clydemonastery.org/StoneStories/>.*

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