



# Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert Abiquíu, New Mexico      Christmas 2006

*May the Christ Child be the guiding star in the desert of your present life.  
Padre Pio*

## Death of Mother Abbess Benedicta Philips

Our Mother Abbess Benedicta died suddenly just after 9.00 a.m. on August 24, 2006. She was 69 years of age. Having suffered chronic ill-health for many years, her death was the result of massive clots in both lungs.

On November 10th, 1982, Mother Benedicta was elected the first Abbess, after Jamberoo monastery had been raised to the status of an abbey early in that year. She was blessed as Abbess on January 29th, 1983. She was spiritual mother, teacher, wise physician and shepherd, in the spirit of St. Benedict, until the end of her life. She wanted to be remembered for one thing only – how much she loved the community she shepherded through, with and in Christ. (Excerpts taken from Jamberoo Abbey website)

We were honored and privileged to have had Mother Benedicta and Sister Hildegard Ryan with us in September 2005. At that time Mother Abbess had a chance to meet with each of us as a community and individually, to encourage us in our monastic journey. In her final talk to us, she said, **“What a glorious vocation! To be part of the founding years of what will surely be a truly holy, strong, and Christ-filled community. A community in which you all really love one another, and therefore, become LOVE at the heart of the Church.”**



Picture by Jennifer Lyden

# Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert

Page 2



## Gratitude

We would like to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for the many ways you support our monastic way of life. We could not continue to fulfill our lives without your prayers and help. We appreciate your many gifts, financial assistance, your service, and the beauty of life you share with us. Many thanks go out to De Vargas Funeral Home in Española for their assistance in printing our newsletter. Thank you for all the help you gave for our raffle in February to send Sister Mary to the Monastic Formators Program in Rome. Esther Manzanares, of Hernandez, NM won the raffle prize of a sapphire ring. She was one of the many nurses who cared for Sister Kateri during her surgery and chemotherapy. We are also grateful to Robert Kyr for the many hours of music training. Heartfelt thanks to the Knights of Columbus of Española, NM, all the businesses of the Española area and friends who helped make our breakfast benefit in March a success. Also, our deepest appreciation to the Denver, Colorado parishes of Our Lady Queen of the Vietnamese Martyrs and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary for a fund raising weekend. May each of you be blessed this Christmas season with the true spirit of joy and peace.



## Formation

*We must then prepare our hearts and bodies for the battle of holy obedience to His instructions. Prologue 40*

In every monastery this preparation comes about through formation classes. It is important for new members of our community to come to an understanding of Scripture and the teachings of the classic monastic writers and teachers of the early centuries. The Rule of St. Benedict is laced with Scripture all the way from the Prologue to Chapter 73.

The formation team needs to have a good training so as to help the new women coming into our community to learn how to live a faithful and strong Benedictine monastic life. To facilitate this, Sister Hilda attended the Monastic Institute in Collegeville, Minnesota July 2-6, 2005, on Forgiveness and Reconciliation. She was able to bring back some cassettes of the conference, which we have been able to share. From March 24-June 24, 2006, Sister Mary attended the Monastic Formators Program in Rome, Italy. She emailed the community whenever she had a chance from her busy schedule. Sister Elizabeth and Sister Mary are studying the Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict with Terrence Kardong, via correspondence. This is a challenging course to take, but very beneficial to our sisters. Sister Mary Isabelle is earning a master's degree in theology, majoring in Christian ethics.

Christmas 2004  
Sister Antonia and  
Mother Mary Benedicta

# Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert

Page 3



Sister Mary (2<sup>nd</sup> from right) in Rome with some of her 28 classmates from England, India, Philippines, Togo, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania



Sister Mary visits St. Mark's Basilica in Venice with Sister Gloria Haule, OSB (Tanzania) and Abba Negusse Woldai, OCist (Eritrea)



Sister Frances and Sister Martina followed Christ's call and are our newest members.



Chloe gets in on dog formation from Sister Hilda



# Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert

Page 4

## Monastic Professions & Consecrations

Mother Abbess Mary Barnes

Sister Elizabeth made her Solemn Profession this past February 2<sup>nd</sup> and Sister Kateri recently made hers on October 1st. Both ceremonies were very special and we are blessed to have six sisters in final vows!



On March 21, Sister Theresa, our culinary artist, made her Temporary Profession for three years. She is a great blessing to our community.



Our new Novice, Sister Martina was clothed on September 28. Her joyful presence is a special gift to the community.

Sister Maria Teresa returned to us in November. She had been taking care of her elderly parents for the past three years.

We have three women who will be coming to join us next summer:

Rosalie Trovato from Chicago, Monica Scalph from Florida and Elvira Caté Chali from Guatemala.

We are pleased to announce the new Abbess from our mother house, Jamberoo Abbey! She was elected on November 21, with Bishop Peter Ingham presiding at the election. Her feast day is November 16, St. Gertrude the Great. Good on ya! You can visit our Mother House at [www.jamberooabbey.org.au](http://www.jamberooabbey.org.au)

Abbot Philip Lawrence with the community, October 1, 2006 on the day of Sister Kateri's Solemn Profession



# Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert

Page 5

## Crafts

Thank you for your interest in our crafts, which are shown on our website. Sister Martina began this year to make lavender pillows, which can be purchased through the gift shop of the Monastery of Christ in the Desert at [www.christdesert.org](http://www.christdesert.org). We will soon be offering painted and carved candles for Baptisms and weddings, etc. Recently, Sister Elizabeth and Sister Theresa attended a one week intense study of icon painting. They commented that the class stressed spirituality!

One of our crafts is rosary making. They come in various colors of cord. Sister Maria Teresa makes rosaries and enjoys using her hands and fingers to form the particular knots. She has mastered making a rosary very quickly. In the silence of her cell, she prays especially during this time for the person who will be using the rosary.



Sister Frances is working on prayer ropes.



These beautiful icons of Mary and the Child Jesus and the Child Jesus were made by our Sisters Elizabeth and Sister Theresa. Copies will be offered on our website, [www.ourladyofthedesert.org](http://www.ourladyofthedesert.org).

# Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert

Page 6



Bulto of La Anunciación  
by Filimón Aguilar  
given to our Monastery by  
Carol Beesley Hennagin  
and  
Judith Mansell Beesley Anderson  
to honor their mother  
Sidney Mansell Beesley 1910-1991

***“Let it be done to me according to your word” Luke 1:38***

*From The Prioress*

Let us rejoice in this beautiful response of our Blessed Mother to the Angel Gabriel upon hearing the message asking her to be the Mother of God. These are the first recorded words in scripture of our Blessed Mother. Her words teach us what it means to live a life of faith in God who loves us. This response can only be made by one who “listens with the ear of her heart,” the first words of the Prologue, from the Rule of our Holy Father Benedict. For me as a Benedictine nun who is called to search for God, especially in His Word, these two responses are an invitation to surrender. A surrender to a God who calls us to know Him by faith, to trust in His loving presence even when that love is not visibly seen or felt in my life or the lives of so many in our world.

My second year as prioress began with a meeting of the American superiors, English Province of the Subiaco Congregation at Holy Cross Monastery in Chicago, Illinois. We had four days of sharing our experiences as superiors. This was a time of encouragement and renewal for my role as prioress, leading the community through many challenges.

On May 30, 2006, Sister Kateri completed her last chemo treatment for colon cancer. At this same time, Mother Julianne was diagnosed with breast cancer (July 7), which required a lumpectomy and radiation treatment. Both are survivors and are doing well.

This year also brought an unexpected revelation. We have come to the realization that we need to have our own home. The Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert has been in existence since 1990, first as Oblates of Christ in the Desert and since 2000, as a foundation of Jamberoo Abbey, Australia. In 1997 the brothers invited us to move on to the property of Monastery of Christ in the Desert.

# Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert

For Unto Us



A Child is Born

Page 7

We moved to the Chama Canyon with 4 sisters and are now 11, and more are asking to join. We have outgrown the current buildings. Also, it is becoming more difficult to support two growing communities in the Chama Canyon. The monks have offered us their property across the Chama River to build our own monastery. However, the cost of building is more than either community can financially manage at this time. Our deceased Mother Abbess Benedicta Philips and our newly elected Abbess Mother Mary Barnes from Jamberoo Abbey as well as Abbot Philip Lawrence support us in our desire to relocate.

Currently, we are exploring a move to San Fidel, New Mexico, a small community 50 miles west of Albuquerque, with 20 acres of property, which include buildings that would allow us to house our present community of 11 sisters with some renovation for a temporary chapel and chaplain's quarters. The property also has a large workshop building which needs to be completed.

Our desire is to be a witness to a life of prayer and work to the world, especially to the young people of our world. We are still looking at other options and I ask for your prayers in this endeavor. As we search for God's will, may our response echo Mary's acceptance, "Let it be done to me according to your word."

Please know that you and your loved ones are in our prayers. Let us pray for peace in our world this coming year and that love may reign in our hearts and in our homes.

Peace,

Mother Mary Benedicta Serna, OSB  
Prioress

This newsletter is posted on our website!

# REJOICE!

*A child is born for us, a son given to us;  
dominion is laid on his shoulder,  
and he shall be called  
Wonderful-Counsellor.  
Antiphon for the  
Christmas Day Mass*

Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert  
PO Box 1040  
Abiquiu, NM 87510 USA  
[www.ourladyofthedesert.org](http://www.ourladyofthedesert.org)

Non-Profit Org. U.S. Postage PAID Abiquiu, NM 87510 Permit No. 10
--

**Address Correction Requested**