



## Monastery of Our Lady of the Desert – November 2013

*“Strengthen the hands that are feeble, make firm the knees that are weak.”  
Isaiah 35:3 from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent*

Dear Friends,

You are all very much in our thoughts and prayers as we approach the time of Advent waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, especially during these times of such financial and political instability. But our times are no different than when baby Jesus was born for us in Bethlehem. As Mary and Joseph held the Christ Child in their arms I imagine their hearts cried out, “God strengthen our hands that feel feeble and make firm our knees that feel weak.” Today like Joseph and Mary let us cry out to God for strength and courage.

As children of the Father our real “work” is to trust in His love for us. When I feel overwhelmed with the challenges of life, it is time to refocus, an “Advent” time. A walk on our mesa allows me to listen for Jesus coming. Also resting in God’s loving presence before the Blessed Sacrament helps me to refocus on Christ and allow Him to open my heart to the Spirit’s creative solutions to life’s challenges.

This fall because of a full scholarship I had the opportunity to attend the Leadership and the Rule of St.

Benedict Course, (LRB) in Rome for two weeks. God comes in such amazing and unexpected ways! These two weeks gave me time to reflect on our life here in the monastery and our world. One of the presenters, Alex Caze, shared how the teachings of the Catholic Church on Social Justice have renewed his life through the Zacchaeus Journey ([www.parcourszachee.com](http://www.parcourszachee.com)) [for now in French only]. This program was created by Pierre Yves Gomez, a consecrated lay person from the Emmanuel Community. It is a journey based on the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church that helps lay people unit their spiritual,

social and professional lives. Alex explained, as followers of Christ, we are called to transform the vision of our daily activities in order to answer our call to sanctity. Each member of the human family is equal in dignity and has equal rights because we are children of God (Encyclical Laborem Exercens John Paul II and Catechism of the Catholic Church #2427) and, that dignity extends to include our work. Our work values effect how we relate to our co-workers and this in turn can affect the coming of the Kingdom of God in our daily lives.

This was brought home to me by the directors of the LRB, Father Luigi Gioia and Professor Gunter Muller-Stewens. Father Luigi is a monk of the University of Sant’ Anselmo, Rome where the workshop was held. Professor Dr. Gunter Muller-Stewens is from the Faculty of Business and Management of the University of Gallen, Switzerland. These two put together a creative team of experts from the business and monastic worlds that opened up new creative ways for us to lead our communities. We learned how to identify our stakeholders, what I like to call shareholders, all those who share in our monastic life. The monastery is not just for monks and nuns. As Chapter 53 of the Rule of St Benedict tells us, we are to welcome each guest/ shareholder as Christ.



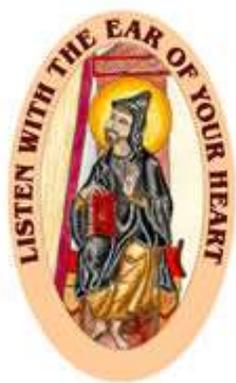
**Benedictine leaders from around the world coming together at Sant’ Anselmo, Rome, for the LRB. They are given simple proven tools to help them find creative solutions to the challenges their communities face.**

Life is meant to be a shared experience and in that sharing we find Christ and this brings about the building of the Kingdom of God. - Here at the monastery we have experienced the building of the Kingdom through the generous support of our *shareholders*. This summer with your generous support it was possible to set up a new modular for the sisters and the hot air solar system. These two big projects are not completed yet. But, having the opportunity to step back from these projects and come together with other Benedictine monks and sisters from around the world helped me realize how much has been accomplished here at the monastery. With the quiet of winter setting upon us we take this time of Advent waiting to give thanks for you who have been Christ among us through your love and kindness. Please know we hold you in our daily prayers. May the Savior's coming strengthen our hands and knees so that together we can continue to build the Kingdom of God among us. *Maranatha*, come Lord Jesus!

**Peace and Joy,**

*M. Benedicta Serna, OSB*

Mother Benedicta Serna, OSB



*Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ, for he will say: 'I was a stranger and you welcomed me.' (Matt 25:35) Proper honor must be shown to all, especially to those who share our faith (Gal 67:10) and to pilgrims.(from the Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 53)*

God bless all those that visited our monastery this past year, for those who attended workshops or were just passing through or stayed longer in the Guesthouse. Thank you for sharing your light & life with us!

You might want to give a *Christmas retreat gift certificate* to a loved one or family member. We have four nice furnished single occupancy guestrooms with private bath. Contact Sister Mary, at 505-419-2938 or via the website.



**Fr. Luigi Gioia leads a lively discussion on risk taking, learning from our failures and discovering new places for abilities & talents.**



**Mother Benedicta. Fr. Joseph Gabriel Cusimano, Mount Savior Monastery, NY, Fr. Brennan Cuthbert, Glenstal Abbey, Ireland, with other participants in groups, making and working a plan.**



**Prior Administrator Fr. Rafalito Alaras, Philippines, Sub-Prior Michael Dowd, USA, enjoying a break in the beautiful cloister garden of Sant' Anselmo.**



The Legion of Mary was with us twice this past year for a day of reflection. Recently, Mother Julianne gave a presentation on Prayer, including different methods such as using icons. Group is shown with M. Benedicta, M. Julianne & Fr. Bernard Cranor, from the Monastery of Christ in the Desert, Abiquiu, New Mexico.



Women of Faith were also with us in October. Mother Julianne guided them on the theme of Prayer, and women who trust in God are confident in their convictions. We have many examples of women in the Bible, who are women of faith. We discussed how these women were women of faith and how we could imitate them in our daily lives.



Paul and Lori Quintana happened to come for Mass and received a special blessing by Bishop James for their 44<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

On Saturday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, we welcomed Bishop James Wall & Father Waldemar Kuchta from the Gallup Diocese. They stayed at our Guesthouse overnight in between administering the sacrament of Confirmation to young adults in the surrounding parishes. On Sunday, the Bishop was the celebrant for Mass in our Chapel and also blessed our new Sacramentary.

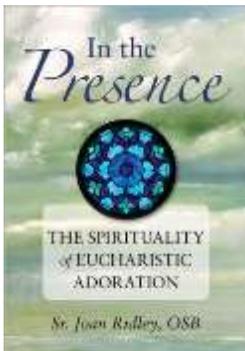


On August 28<sup>th</sup>, Sister Rene Backe, CSA, Vicar of Religious for the Gallup Diocese met with the community at the St Joseph Center. After giving us a brief background of her work, Sister Rene asked the sisters three questions: *What are our joys, our challenges and our needs?* In the afternoon Mother Benedicta gave Sister Rene a tour of our monastery.

Sister Joan Ridley, OSB, directed our annual retreat October 17-22, 2013. Sister Joan is a member of the Benedictines of Perpetual Adoration in Tuscon, Arizona. Her joyful Benedictine enthusiasm and joy was an inspiration. She gave us talks, which included “Monastic Life,” “Why are we Here?” “God Sees us,” “Moderation,” “Mercy,” “Obedience,” and other topics from the Rule of St. Benedict and its application.



Sister Joan also shared with us about the theme of Adoration and the Monastic Life, that “*Adoration deepens in us the communion that happens in the celebration of the Eucharist and in other instances of daily life. ‘Contemplation is the means with which we “receive” the mysteries; with which we interiorize them and open ourselves to their action; a way of allowing the grace, received in the sacraments, to mold our inner universe: our thoughts, affections, will, memory.’*” Author of *In the Presence: The Spirituality of Eucharistic Adoration*, she explains the history, and meaning of Adoration as Eucharistic Spirituality. This paperback is simple, yet rich in content and noted as the best in contemporary theology.



Available at our Santo Niño Gift Shop, for \$7.00.

**Solar UPDATE** – As most of you know, we have in place a Chapel, Guesthouse, St. Joseph Center (for retreats and/or conferences), Refectory/kitchen, 8-room modular for the sisters. In January we made a commitment to environment awareness and are investing in a hot air solar system because last year our propane bill was \$4,000.00, not including the electric bill for the use of heaters for sisters that were cold. The intent is to have a good solar contribution for the buildings and reduce

heating expenses. We appreciate all those who have helped us with this project, especially our workers, who have patiently spent many hours in contributing their know-how from installing of frames for the solar panels on the roof of the carport to creating a cement container of rocks to store heat, to making sure the ducts were properly fitted to suit the solar system. We have pictures and updates posted in a separate link on our website.

**Helping Hands** - One of our cats recently slipped through a construction opening unbeknown to us and we heard meowing and meowing underneath the crawl space under the sisters’ modular building. She could not get out and was meowing for help. Her two companions were outside of a covered vent of the crawl space. They were meowing and scratching to get in, trying to help her out. If that isn’t about Helping Claws, I don’t know what is! Working together in community has its challenges, as we “Prefer nothing to Christ,” and the challenge of seeing the face of Christ in our sisters.

Benedicta’s zucchini bread is made with eggs, sugar, zucchini, vanilla, flour, salt, baking soda, baking powder, cinnamon, coconut and walnuts. Just drop us a line and Mother will gladly mail you the secret recipe.

Helping hands is a choice that we make each day from our hearts. Should I help another sister who seems to be in disarray? How about adding an extra chore to help another sister finish her work? Recently, baking for one of our fund raisers, Mother Benedicta wanted to prepare at least 12 of her famous Zucchini breads. The kitchen appeared to be in turmoil, but a sister, who had enough chores of her own, offered her helping hands to complete the baking project. Hands are gifts. They are the tools of good works. Our monastic life here at the monastery would not be possible without the helping hands of so many friends and benefactors, who have journeyed with us in so many ways.

Those extra hours that the workers have stayed in order to finish a particular project.

The helping hands of anonymous donors who have blessed us with their contributions, the many businesses that donated prizes for our yearly Ice Cream Social, parishes and local parish fiestas that hosted us to sell our crafts and religious items. Hands who helped us sell at the Charismatic conferences in Albuquerque, NM and Colorado Springs, CO. The famous Walmart also had a hand in giving us \$500, to help furnish our new Clayton Home modular building and Schwab Charitable was able to grant us \$10,000, for our Chapel.



### Comings & Goings

Our Novice, Sister Agnes Le left for Sydney, Australia, September 27<sup>th</sup> for nine months. She will be studying at our Mother House, Jamberoo Abbey.

It took a lot of correspondence to obtain the visa; but, thanks to the sisters of Jamberoo Abbey, all went well. In April, we even had to send S. Agnes Le to Denver, Colorado, to complete the process, which included a complete physical examination. Thanks to our friend Thayer, the sisters were hosted for a few days.



Sister Hilda continues to take an interest in the Divine Office after attending a Gregorian

Workshop in May 2012 (St. Vincent College, Larobe, PA). She is now studying with Nadine Zumwalt, course entitled *Piano Basics* at the San Juan College, Farmington, NM. As one of our Chantresses, Sister Hilda takes the time to practice often on the keyboard, going over the homework

plus doing a fine job with learning better the antiphons and music for the Divine Office.

We had a lot of excitement with a prowling bear in June. Sister Guadalupe was very concerned if the officials were going to kill the



bear. It was tagged already because it had been rescued as a baby cub and was raised in captivity until it was old enough to be able to survive on its own in the wild. After working with the New Mexico Fish and Game, Mr. Brad Ryan, Farmington District Office Northwest Area Operations, NM Game & Fish carefully anesthetized the bear and the bear is now safe and was taken to the mountains in Taos, New Mexico.

Sister Elizabeth will complete her Associates degree in Fine Arts in December 2013, NM Community College in Albuquerque, NM. This last semester of study concentrated most her attention on actual art projects. Recent blog (<http://etran3.wordpress.com/>) from S. Elizabeth, *I started to know about painting just 7 years ago. At that time, I did not know anything about art. All I could see from an artwork is colors and pictures and they were all the same to me. Thanks to school, I am getting to know something more about this world.*



Print Making, Our Lady of Guadalupe by S. Elizabeth

Sister Mary took a 30 day hermit retreat the Monastery of Christ in the Desert, Abiquiu, NM in May. She takes very good care of the cats, but in May she mentioned that the wind was so strong one day that the cats were blown backwards! She continues to work on the grave vines and could use some volunteers to help with the design layout and staking the vines.



After a strong cup of coffee each day, Mother Julianne continues to be our community chauffeur, head seamstress, and bookkeeper. She took the time to prepare and lead a couple of Retreats and Days of Recollection this past year. Yes, when she has free time, she always has her nose in a book!

Thanks to an anonymous donor, Sister Agnes Le and Sister Kateri attended a Novice and Director Institute (NADI), Sacred Heart Monastery Yankton, South Carolina in May.



The theme was *Benedictine Tools For Monastic Transformation*. The days were very well scheduled, which included not only conferences, but interacting and sharing stories with nine Novices and nine Directors. How do we tend the seed of our monastic calling? What tools can we use to help ensure that we bear fruit? You might want to read the *Rule of St. Benedicta, Chapter 4, Tools of Good Works*.

*Contemplative Living and Awareness* have been the two monthly topics of the BSFP (Benedictine Spirituality Formation Program) pponsored by the Benet Hill Monastery in Colorado Springs, CO, S. Kateri will be taking this two-year course on-line and visit the Monastery at various times for workshops.



As Formator, this course will concentrate on personal transformation and spiritual growth to help others. The challenge for S. Kateri is writing reflective papers.

## Christmas Raffle

Many of our friends have asked about our annual Christmas Raffle. A gentleman from Illinois has kindly donated a 14kw link style floral twig design necklace, in memory of his beloved mother.



The appraised value of this beautiful necklace is \$7,995. The necklace weighs 21.4 grams with stones. There are 108 diamonds and 5 sapphires.

2<sup>nd</sup> prize will be a handmade 100% cotton quilt by



Julia Lobato, 68 x 89", with a kaleidoscope pattern, valued at \$500.00. The beautiful blend of colors (yellow and white background) makes it a very special bed covering. **SEE TICKETS FOR OTHER PRIZES.** The drawing of these raffle prizes will be on January 1,

2014, the Solemnity of the Mary, the Mother of God. Tickets are \$25 each or 5 tickets for \$100. We hope that you will consider buying a ticket to help reduce our propane bill because we still have four buildings that are heated with propane. As we have the funding we will continue to set these buildings up for hot air solar heating. One step at a time. Our policy has been that we do not invest in material projects unless we have the funding.

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*Let us turn in prayer to Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of our faith...Remind us that those who believe are never alone. Teach us to see all things with the eyes of Jesus, that he may be light for our path. And may this light of faith always increase in us, until the dawn of that undying day which is Christ himself, your Son, Our Lord! (Pope Francis, June 29, 2013) [Painting by S. Elizabeth, "Our Lady at the Foot of the Cross."]*



**This past year's Ice Cream Social Teen Talent Show included guitar playing, singing, dancing and reciting poetry. Thanks to all the participants!**



**Our Hot Air Solar System Crew at work: Ernest, Javier, Felix, and Tommy. Team effort!**

**Brother Francis from the Monastery of Christ in the Desert using his artistic talents to repair the statue of Mary in our Chapel, which included repainting the statue.**



***Please pray with us for a Chaplain to serve our community. We are located in the Gallup Diocese, on Hwy 64 between Blanco and Dulce, NM, thirteen miles from Navajo Lake in the San Juan River that runs below Navajo Dam. If you know of any priest that might be interested, please let us know. For more information, contact us via our website or telephone Mother Benedicta, Prioress at 505-419-2938.***

*You know the time, it is the hour now for you to awake from sleep. For our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. Romans 13:11*

