

Leaven

Vol. 34, Issue 1 Summer 2016

St. Walburg Monastery • Covington, Kentucky



Because all creatures are connected,
each must be cherished with love and respect,
for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another.

Laudato Si (42)

Facing The Future With Hope

On May 9, 2016, **Sr. Mary Catherine Wenstrup**, Prioress of St. Walburg Monastery, spoke to more than 250 residents of Villa Hills about St. Walburg Monastery's long range planning efforts. The public meeting at River Ridge Elementary School was designed by the staff of Planning and Development Services (PDS) of Kenton County as part of a small area study undertaken because of our decision to sell some of our property for retirement funding.



The following are excerpts from Sr. Mary Catherine's presentation to the group (see picture below):

The first members of our community arrived in Covington in 1859. By 1890 they had built St. Walburg Monastery (1862) and Academy (1890) on 12th Street. We bought our first piece of property at our present location (2500 Amsterdam Road) in 1903. It was known as the Collins farm. The following year we accepted boarders and day pupils from the neighboring farms as Villa Madonna Academy's first students.

The domed Academy building was finished in 1907 and in 1921 we opened Villa Madonna College, now Thomas

More, as a way to further the education of our sisters and lay women. The original Collins residence is still in use today as our Guest House.

From 1922 until 1947 we bought additional farms to the east and west of the Academy site. They included:

- the Lee property, (1922) site of the present monastery building;
- the Brown property (1928), the 82 acres we plan to sell. We used this property for farming, pastures for cattle and for our cemetery (which will not be included in the sale);
- the Maegley property, (1938) a small piece of land that fronts Amsterdam Road;
- the Hall farm (1947) which is now the site for Madonna Manor.

We built our present monastery building in 1937,

joined with local residents to establish the city of Villa Hills in 1962, developed Madonna Manor to provide care for the elderly in 1964, closed our farm in 1967 because it was no longer profitable,

added an infirmary wing to the monastery in 1967 to provide better space and care for our sick and elderly sisters ,

signed an ongoing, never broken, lease for a dollar a year with the city for playing fields in 1972 and opened Villa Madonna Montessori in the converted dairy barn in 1972.

In 2007 we transferred Madonna Manor to the Sylvania Franciscans in order to continue its mission and service to the elderly.

Over the years, while staying on the same piece of property we have had at least four different address-

es and belonged to several cities. Since 1903 we have considered ourselves as part of the local neighborhood. As long time residents we want you to know that, like you, we care about who will be our next new neighbors. We remember how we felt when we first heard and saw the bulldozers on Carpenters Trace. That event prompted



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Sisters Deborah Harmeling and Margaret Mary Gough, editors.

Cover: **Mother Earth** by Sister Emmanuel Pieper.

Pictures: Sisters Emmanuel Pieper, Mary Tewes and Deborah Harmeling. us to plant a row of pine trees to insure our privacy.

Our way of life as Benedictine sisters calls us to seek God faithfully in prayer, community life and service to others. To fulfill the call of the Gospel, we trained and sent sisters to serve in schools and hospitals in the Diocese of Covington, eastern Kentucky and Colorado. In the 60's and 70's we took on new ministries in the fields of religious education, parish work, social services, counseling and spiritual direction, to name a few.

We want you to know how grateful we are to the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) which provided funding and professional consultants to guide our planning over the past four years. Many of you have contributed to that fund and we have benefited enormously. Thanks to all who contribute! We are also grateful for the opportunity to plan in cooperation with Madonna Manor, the City of Villa Hills and the Planning and Development Services of Kenton County. They have respected and supported our efforts to plan for our future.

Lastly, I want to tell you something about the way Benedictine women plan and make decisions. We live according to the teaching of the 6th century Rule of St. Benedict. In Chapter 3 Benedict tells the abbot (prioress) that when anything of great importance is to be decided, the entire community is to be called together for counsel. The prioress is to hear their advice. *Hear* is an active verb that requires more than being polite. The members are to express their opinions with humility and are not to defend their views. That is what we do until we come to agreement. We know that we need to sell some of our land in order to secure our community's continued presence, service and outreach in this neighborhood and in the Church.

We hope that the land's future use will also be beneficial to

you, residents of Villa Hills, and the city itself. Given the organization of this evening's meeting, you could think that PDS and the city of Villa Hills have studied the Rule of Benedict. The meeting is structured so that we all listen to what you, the citizens, have to tell us about future development of our land.



Information gath-

ered from studies that have been done about the city will be shared with you. City officials, staff members of PDS and some of us are part of the table groups to hear and take notes on what you have to contribute. We are here because we are facing the future with hope.

Editor's Note: The Benedictine Sisters are grateful to all who attended and participated in the May 9 public meeting. We appreciated your ideas, questions and concerns about the sale of our property. We were impressed by your support and you will hear more about the project in the future.

The Chronicles

by Sr. Andrea Collopy, OSB

November, December--The oldest building on the original property purchased by St. Walburg Monastery in 1903 was the Lee House. A beautiful, well-built residence, it has served in many ways for many years—school, residence for boarders, sisters' residence and guest house. The sisters who were living in the house moved to the monastery last summer and now all three floors of bedrooms and other facilities have been renovated for guests only. Sr. Mary Carol Hellmann is the "guest mistress" and is proud to welcome visitors.

November--The November issue of *Ft. Mitchell Living* featured an article on Villa Madonna Montessori. Attracting attention to the article was the cover, a full page picture of the Montessori students. It featured a history of the school from its beginning in 1971 in the former barn which had been on the property when the Benedictine Sisters acquired it, until the present. Today approximately fifty students—ages 3 to 6—attend the school.

Dec. 6 -- Today is the second Sunday of Advent. In anticipation of the collection for retired religious scheduled for next Sunday, local women religious spoke at various parishes. From St. Walburg Monastery gracious volunteers were: Sr. Nancy Kordenbrock, Sts. Boniface & James, Ludlow; Sr. Sharon Portwood, Our Savior Parish, Covington; Sr. Mariana Kirk, Cathedral, Covington; Sr. Kathleen Ryan, Mary Queen of Heaven, Erlanger; Sr. Mary Rabe, St. Anthony, Taylor Mill; Sr. Deborah Harmeling, Holy Cross, Latonia; and **Sr. Dorothy Schuette**, Mother of God, Covington. As the number of retired religious increases, the generosity of parishioners is deeply appreciated. Dec. 16--At the main entrance to the monastery property early this morning, equipment for demolishing the white "Gate House" appeared. With a small

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group of Sisters watching, the house was a crushed heap by noon. In the early years after its acquisition, this house had been a residence for some employees of the Monastery and in more recent years several sisters resided there. After an electrical fire emergency proved the house dangerous for habitation, the decision was made to demolish it. By the end of December the remnants of the house had been removed and the area was awaiting a "grassy cover". Dec. 31, '15 –Jan 1, '16--Ending an old year and beginning a new one! An early schedule for Morning Prayer and Eucharist made it a different Thursday! After a busy day, Evening Prayer honored Mary, Mother of God, and after the gospel reading Sr. Emmanuel **Pieper** presented a visual history of Mary in art through the centuries. Pictures were shown on the chapel wall from a power point operated by Sr. Christa Kreinbrink. It was a unique and excellent learning experience. The New Year's Eve party with games and refreshments followed Night Prayer and the "dropping of the ball" from the front entry balcony ended the old year of 2015 and welcomed in 2016 for St. Walburg Monastery. On New Year's Day, a good number of visitors shared Eucharist with us. In the afternoon of a generally quiet day, a "Limburger Cheese Party", another tradition, was held. The party also served as a celebration to honor our valued Chef. Maureen Smain, for her 10 years of service to the community.

Jan. 3--On this feast of the Epiphany we welcomed Sr. Julianne Babcock, OSB, of Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana. Sr. Julianne will spend some Sabbatical time residing in Cottage Seven.

Jan. 17--Srs. Mary Carol Hellmann and Mary Tewes participated in the *Wake Up the World c*oncert, celebrating the Year of Consecrated Life, at St. Peter in Chains Cathedral in Cincinnati. 119 women and men religious from

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Catholic Social Teaching Through the Lens of Mercy

Fr. Kenneth Overberg, SJ, Professor Emeritus of Xavier University in Cincinnati is pictured right and below talking with Vickie Cimprich and Sr. Joan Fraenzle at the April 9 Center of Spirituality Day. (See Chronicles for more details.)





A spirited discussion took place at the table group below. Starting in the lower left corner clockwise: Sr. Joan deChristopher, C.PP.S., Srs. Rosemary McCormack, Martha Walther and David Ruschmann, OSB, Sr. Mary Garke, C.PP.S. and an unidentified participant.



Sr. Emmanuel Continues Sharing Her Talent

Earlier this year the Benedictine Health System of Duluth, Minnesota, which produces prayer cards every year to share with its 6.000 employees throughout the Midwest, asked Sr. Emmanuel Pieper if they could use her watercolor of St. Scholastica for the cards. They also asked if she could produce a matching piece of St. Benedict. Sr. Emmanuel created the image of Benedict to the right.



Sr. Cathy Receives Certificate in Spiritual Direction

On May 9 **Sr. Cathy Bauer** (center below) received her certificate in Spiritual Direction from a two year intern-

ship program in spiritual direction. (See Chronicles for more details.)
Attending the ceremony in Beech Grove, Indiana, were: left to right,
Srs. Joan Fraenzle, Emmanuel Pieper, Sharon Portwood, Mariana
Kirk, Mary Rabe
and Mary Tewes.



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Ohio, Northern Ky. and Indiana participated. A capacity audience appreciated the inspirational concert.

Feb. 1-5--Catholic Schools Week was observed by Villa Madonna Academy in various ways. Visits to the monastery by each elementary class throughout the week enabled the community to meet with students and view their projects and costumes, as well as enjoy conversations. By invitation, a few Sisters visited the high school classes to answer questions and share experiences of Benedictine life.

Feb. 8-14--Sr. Mary Catherine Wenstrup, having visited and assisted Benedictine Sisters in China, was asked to give a report and participate in a Feb. 13 meeting in Rome on the Church in China. At the meeting seventeen reports were given - Sr. Mary Catherine was #3. She met Chinese Sisters whom she knew from her trip to China. During her stay in Rome she was privileged to attend the Ash Wednesday Eucharist celebrated by *Pope Francis*. Feb. thru April--Sr. Aileen Bankem**per** has been active these months in service to other Benedictine communities in the US. Feb. 5-6 she met with the Discernment Committee for the Election of Prioress at St. Benedict Monastery, St. Joseph, MN. Feb. 25-26 she conducted a communication workshop at Annunciation Monastery, Bismarck, ND; Mar. 19 a facilitation at St. Scholastica Monastery, Boerne, TX and on April 22 was the presenter on the topic of "Collaboration" to Sisters under age 55 at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, IN. Mar. 12-- The annual Villa-Rama fundraiser was held in the VMA gvm this evening. A large gathering of supporters was greeted by a beautifully decorated facility with Kentucky symbols including a life-size stallion, blue and white colors everywhere and much southern hospitality. The program cover featured the Villa dome and the letters **HOME!** An amazing spread of

items was available for the auctions-

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something for everyone and a good time as well!

Mar. 12--Sr. Cathy Bauer attended the *Rally for Hope: Stop Separating Families* a 2-mile march in Cincinnati. Beginning at Holy Family Church, the two-hour event sponsored by eight organizing groups, was a response to deportation priority—immigration women and children from Central America. Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center, Over-the-Rhine, was a sponsor of the event which drew about 300 participants.

Mar. 24-27--The Lenten season culminated in our usual grace-filled Triduum! The Liturgy Committee prepared well for Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday services. Fr. John Cahill, our chaplain, presided at all but Holy Saturday when Fr. Frank Voellmecke graciously substituted. Our Liturgy of the Hours during these days was also special, as well as Easter Sunday Eucharist attended by many friends and relatives. The traditional brunch followed. God's blessings were abundant during these holiest of days!

Mar. 29--Susan Leidecker and her husband were guests at dinner this evening. Susan is retiring after serving as our bookkeeper for nearly 13 years. A grateful community expressed its appreciation and best wishes for a peace-filled retirement. Apr. 8 -- A group of our sisters attended the blessing and dedication of the new activity building, Adelaide Center, at Madonna Manor. Most Rev. Roger Foys presided at the blessing and procession through this newest addition at Madonna Manor. Mother Adelaide, OSF, was the first superior of the Sylvania Franciscans who assumed care of Madonna Manor from the Benedictine Sisters. Many past and present men and women, active in the development of the nursing facility, were present for this joyful occasion

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2016 Oblate Ice Cream Social



On June 15 the Benedictine Oblates held their annual Ice Cream Social for Sisters and Oblates. (See Chronicles for more details..) Pictured left starting at the top of the circle, clockwise: Srs. Margaret Mary Gough and Andrea Collopy, Mrs. & Mr. John Trokan, Srs. Denise and Stella Gough.

Right: Oblates **Mary Easterling** and **Aubrey Schmidt** serve drinks at the social



Left: Daniel and Joseph Schmidt, sons of Oblates Aubrey & Dan Schmidt, try their voices at calling Bingo. Oblate Jim Lockhart shows them how.

The Hills of Kentucky Dulcimer Group entertain with traditional music for the social.



Students from St. Bede Academy Return to St. Walburg Monastery



On June 26 thirteen students and two chaperones from St. Bede Academy in Peru, Illinois, began a week of service in Northern Kentucky. (See Chronicles for more details.) Left: Sr. Mary Rabe works with a student cleaning blinds on the third floor.

Right: **Srs. Henrietta Seiler** and **Martha Feder** enjoy an afternoon game of cards with two students.



Right: **Sr. Emmanuel Pieper** holds a group art session with the students and their chaperones. Completed artworks were displayed in the hall going from the infirmary to the monastery dining room.



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Apr. 9--Our latest Spirituality Day was very well attended. Rev. Kenneth Overberg, S.J., Professor Emeritus of Xavier University, directed a full day on Catholic Social Teaching through the Lens of Mercy. The four presentations were: Mercy and Unexamined Convictions: An Overview of Catholic Social Teaching; Works of Mercy and Catholic Social Teaching; Take Home—Everyday Life in an Election **Year.** Each of these was followed by table discussion, questions and explanations. Fr. Overberg distributed an information packet which also contained several of his published articles on today's topics. The well-spent day gave participants much to ponder. Apr. 15-17--Sr. Kimberly Porter provided a weekend retreat on the Prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict to the Oblates of Our Lady of Grace Monastery in Beech Grove, IN. The following weekend she attended the "55 and Under" gathering there. About eighty women religious participated in the program entitled "New Wineskins". At this same conference our **Sr. Aileen** Bankemper spoke about *Benedictine* Collaboration: Labora for Our Times. Apr. 16--The Cincinnati Enquirer featured an article on a subject our community has had under consideration for some time. A picture of St. Mary's House and the adjacent land introduced the general public to this subject in the article titled "Nuns hope to sell old Villa Hills farmstead." These 82 acres of pasture land will be considered at a May 9 public meeting to help determine its possible development. This is part of the process by the City of Villa Hills and the Kenton County Planning Commission to determine zoning changes in preparation for placing the land on the market. Development of the property is to be something to benefit the Benedictine Sisters and the Villa Hills community.

May 1--Srs. Cathy Bauer and Kimberly Porter attended a gathering of Vocation Directors and Sisters (55 and Continued on next page

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under) at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Indiana. Participants came from various dioceses to discuss ways of partnering and inviting women to share the life of women religious. The discussions were lively and surfaced many possibilities to be explored in months to come.

May 9--Sr. Cathy Bauer received her certificate in Spiritual Direction from the internship program offered by the Benedictine Sisters at Benedict Inn Retreat and Conference Center, Beech Grove, Indiana. Sr. Cathy began this program in Sept. 2014 and it consisted of Monday evening classes through four semesters and an April retreat. In addition to the classroom component, the program offered a practicum in which Sr. Cathy, as an intern, provided spiritual direction with helpful criticism.

May 9-- A Villa Hills public meeting was held at River Ridge Elementary School to get input from the local community on the rezoning of 82 acres of green space which St. Walburg Monastery hopes to sell. A packed house indicated the interest held by residents in this area, as well as their interest in the Benedictine Sisters who have had their monastery here for so many years. Many notes were taken on the information supplied and on the discussions. The Planning Committee, acting on behalf of the monastery, will have much to consider at their next meeting.

June 10—The Serra Club of the Diocese of Covington and Bishop Roger Foys invited women religious and seminarians to its annual picnic at Summit Hills Country Club. Benedictine sisters enjoyed the opportunity to visit with sisters from other communities, priests and seminarians. A bountiful lunch, cards and games, as well as prizes and gift bags were highlights of the event. The delightful Serra Club event ended with a short prayer service.

June 15—The Benedictine Oblates sponsored their annual Ice Cream Social this afternoon. A performance by the Hills of Kentucky Dulcimer Group began the celebration. A new twist to the Continued on next page

What We Learned from Reading Laudato Si

Last fall, as a community, we took time to read and discuss together Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Com-*



mon Home. As a result, we thought we would share our experience of reading the encyclical and encourage others to do the same. Six sisters (Srs. Andrea Collopy, Margaret Mary Gough, Mary Carol Hellmann, Emmanuel Pieper, Mary Tewes and Barbara Woeste) responded to a request for comments.

Sr. Margaret Mary started out. "The title of Pope Francis' first encyclical drew me to read it and try to comprehend its meaning for me – *On Care for Our Common Home*. That phrase, like so many of the Pope's messages to the world, sounded 'down to earth', no pun intended. And it is down to earth! While scientific studies uncover the threats to our planet, Francis says, dialogue and education are the keys to understanding the scientific data. I was struck by the phrase that these two factors can 'help us to escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us.' To me, this is a frightening image. It was helpful to discuss the document and share ideas with others in the group. Sharing our thoughts on how to reduce pollution and waste in a society that has a 'throw-away mentality' produced many ideas of how we can help make a small impact in our own situation... the list was endless. Our community is serious about recycling – we've been doing it for many years." Sr. Mary agreed, saying, "Being responsible to a group for reading a section and coming together to share our understandings, the insights we gathered and the impact it had on each one of us was very enriching."

The most important message from the encyclical to Sr. Emmanuel was "Personal responsibility for any part of the ecological field I can help or influence." Sr. Margaret Mary noted "In Chapter

One Pope Francis sets out some of the most serious challenges facing 'Our Common Home'. Water is the one that struck me as being the most critical. Access to safe drinking water is a basic and universal human right, yet entire populations are at risk because of contaminated water."



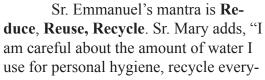
Sr. Mary Carol said *Lau-*

dato Si informed her that "Respect for the earth is related to the livelihood of the poor. We are all one human family, and how we treat our

common home affects all of us as well as those who will come after us." Sr. Andrea was impressed with the abundance of scientific information included in it, and Sr. Emmanuel noted that she has "a great sense of pride that this document, with so many steps addressed, came from the leader of the Catholic Church." Sr. Mary Carol adds "[the encyclical] is easy to understand, and gives practical ideas for implementation. I was impressed by Francis' respect for other cultures and scholars. It seemed to be a cooperative venture, not just his own ideas, and should encourage even more collaboration with scientists, environmentalists and political leaders."

When the sisters were asked what actions they have taken because of reading the encyclical, they all got practical although Sr. Margaret Mary started out with a dream. "Is it too unreal to dream of a year or two dedicated to the single goal of ensuring every country, every person has access to safe drinking water? If leaders in every country, with all their potential power, under the direction of the United Nations, would focus on the single challenge and moral responsibility of

providing safe drinking water for ALL
-- I believe it could become a reality.
Turning off the faucet in solidarity with
the poorest and most vulnerable people
in the world may help to make such a
dream come true. And it doesn't hurt to
pray for such a dream."



thing that can be, eat the food I put on my plate, choose good foods for my health, make doctor appointments on time to care for my body. Sr. Mary Carol in her role as our Guest House coordinator says,"I'm more careful about use of water and paper, using cloth napkins for visitors at the Guest House and explaining why. So far they've all been most appreciative." Sr. Barbara who could not make the group meetings but



read the encyclical by herself says, "I am more conscious of cardboard and paper recycling to the proper places designated. I try to be conservative with water. I also write emails and sign petitions to reduce the production of carbon dioxide." Sr. Andrea reminds us of the need for recycling,

conservation and prayer for God's created universe.

All the sisters encouraged others to read and discuss the encyclical. If you are interested in learning more about *Laudato Si* and its teachings, please join us on October 8 for a Center of Spirituality Day by **Sr. Caroljean Willie, SC** entitled *Laudato Si: A Blueprint for the 21st Century*. More information is on the back page of this issue.

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social were menus for the sisters who had difficulty walking to the ice cream table. They could decide what kind of ice cream and toppings they wanted, and Oblates brought the concoctions to them. Next was the usual prize-filled bingo called by Oblate Jim Lockhart and punctuated by his groan-worthy jokes. Everyone was a winner at least once if not several times in this bingo. It was a multi-generational event as many children of Oblates were also in attendance and helped serve ice cream and take the prize carts to winners. A heartfelt thankyou to all the Oblates.

June 26—Thirteen students from St. Bede Academy, Peru, Illinois, arrived at the Guest House this evening accompanied by Fr. Ronald Margheno, OSB and chaperon, Kathy Martin. Six of the students were visitors last year..Beginning with Morning Prayer and breakfast the sudents joined the sisters to begin a day filled with activity at the monastery. The students and some of the sisters cleaned blinds and other areas of the monastery during the morning hours. In the afternoon they joined individual sisters and groups to play cards, dominos, puzzles, take walks, or just chat. In one card group the two students were very eager to learn new card games to take back to their weekly card group. The sisters were surprised to learn the girls even played euchre on their lunch hour and other times on their iPads! After an afternoon art session with Sr. Emmanuel the students had dinner together in the lower level and departed for St. Agnes and a night in a homeless shelter. The rest of the week they joined other youth in the area at local social service agencies. On Friday they departed for a fun trip to Mammoth Cave and hiking trails. Sr. Cathy Bauer had a well-planned and resourceful week outlined for the students. When Malcolm, one of the students, was asked by another young man from St. Henry's District High Shool what the best part of being here was he responded..."Talking to the sisters."

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