Oblates Hold Joint Meeting
By Sister Cynthia Cunningham, OSB

On Saturday, April 29, 2017 St. Walburga Monastery hosted the annual joint meeting of New Jersey’s oblates. Oblates are individuals interested in applying the Rule of Benedict to their daily lives. They affiliate with a Benedictine Monastery to enrich their spiritual lives as well as to assist the monastery as needed. Since the first joint meeting at Newark Abbey on May 12, 2007, the New Jersey Oblates have been meeting together annually at a different monastery on a rotating basis. The Oblates and their directors: Reverend Albert Holtz, OSB and Kristen Wisniewski of Newark Abbey, Newark NJ; Reverend Hilary O’Leary, OSB of St. Mary’s Abbey, Morristown, NJ and Sisters Ursula Butler and Cynthia Cunningham of St Walburga Monastery, participated in the day.

A light breakfast followed Morning Praise and Eucharistic celebration with the sisters. The speaker was Therese Saulnier, Coordinator of Contemplative Outreach of New Jersey. Therese has been practicing and teaching Centering prayer for over 29 years. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in theology from Fordham University. She is a dynamic speaker and her presentation, “Seven Deadly Attitudes: Attachments, Aversions, Comparisons, Expectation, Anticipations, Competition, and Judgments” was well received by the attendees. The event ended with the Oblates joining the sisters for Noon Day Prayer and a luncheon.

For information about the Oblate program at St. Walburga Monastery, please call (908) 352-4278 to contact Sister Ursula Butler at Ext. 614 or Sister Cynthia Cunningham at Ext. 215.

Sister Gabrielle Keenen Retires
By Sister Marlene Milasus, OSB

Studies have shown that the average American moves and changes jobs ten or more times. Such is not the case for Sister Gabrielle Keenen, who has retired after fifty-four years of health-care ministry in Kingston, New York.

Sister Gabrielle had volunteered as a high-school nurses’ aide at St Francis Hospital in her home town of Poughkeepsie, New York, and then decided to enroll in the nursing school attached to Benedictine Hospital in Kingston. She enjoyed the normal run of life for a young nursing student: studies, clinical work, dating and social events, but, she says, “little did I know that a religious vocation was also hatching in my inner soul...”

By the time she had become a registered nurse, she knew that she was being called to enter the Benedictine Sisters of Elizabeth. On the Feast of the Epiphany in 1954, Sister Gabrielle became a postulant, “this country girl who was now practicing silence and the Rule of St. Benedict.”

(continue on page 2)

Celebrating 150 Years

The Benedictine Sisters will be celebrating 150 Years (1868-2018) in Elizabeth, New Jersey with the theme:

Reverence the Sacredness of the Past
Recognize the Grace of the Present
Respond to God’s Call into the Future

November 19, 2017 - November 18, 2018.

The Jubilee Year will include Open Houses and other opportunities for us to show our gratitude to everyone who has shared our journey with us.

The next issue of the Listening Post will include more details of our Jubilee Year.
Someone once said it is a blessing to live in interesting times. The more we live through these “interesting times”, however, the more I am struck by the wisdom of Saint Benedict and his “little rule for beginners”. He too lived in an era of great turbulence and decadence. His response to the Spirit led Benedict to a way of life that is all about learning to love the other in Community and beyond. This is possible only in an ever deepening relationship with God whom we seek daily in prayer and in humble obedience to His will manifested in our neighbor and in and through the events of our days.

In a recent interview Father Richard Rohr, OFM, stated, "...the great sin of the United States is superficiality“. We are “nice and friendly, but don’t expect much depth.” Ouch! Then he added “People are recognizing that we cannot FAKE being Christian anymore, we can’t just be superficial post Vatican II Christians”. Faith is a verb.

Recently, in Manhattan I passed a woman sleeping on a cardboard on the sidewalk. I passed with sympathy, but with no sense of responsibility. Actually, I passed Jesus suffering and failed to offer even a cup of coffee. Benedict counsels us to see Christ in each person. That Jesus lives in the other is our bedrock faith. This woman is in my daily prayers. Should I ever pass her again or someone in a similar situation, I pray for a sense of privileged opportunity remembering “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers you do to Me”.

**Continued from page1 Sister Gabrielle...**

She went through the various stages of Benedictine formation, completed a B.S. in nursing at Seton Hall University, briefly taught first-grade at Bender Academy, and then returned to Benedictine Hospital in 1958 to complete some intern work. She is still in Kingston!

During those years, she worked as a staff nurse, obtained a Master’s degree, was a nursing instructor, vice-president of nursing, an adjunct instructor at Mount Saint Mary’s College, and vice-president for quality resource management, retiring in March. Recipient of many awards, she simply speaks of loving her work and her co-workers.

Sister Gabrielle has always balanced her intensive professional life with Benedictine values. She served on various community committees and helped to formulate the Sisters’ first full revision of the Liturgy of the Hours. Camping, photography, and family ties were always part of her life. She quickly learned computer technology, and continues to master its newest forms as they emerge. She demonstrates Benedictine hospitality to the wild animals and birds that surround the Sisters’ convent in Kingston, and keeps an observant eye on internet-accessed nests of owls and ospreys.

A life-long learner, Sister Gabrielle Keenen personifies the Benedictine calling to listen, always, with the ear of the heart.
Sister Sightings

Sr. Rosemary (L) is recognized at Our Lady of Guadalupe School for 50 years of teaching.

Sr. Marcia (middle) poses with colleagues from the Union County Educational Services Commission while being recognized at the time of her retirement.

Sr. Mary Downey reads to the children in the Preschool.

Sr. Mariette Thérèse with the Monastic Live-In participants.

Sr. Diane Marie Kester carries the wreath for the May crowning at the Archdiocesan Center.

Sr. Marietta Thérèse and Ursula attend ordination celebration for Fr. Maximilian at Newark Abbey.

The Infirmary celebrates summer with a luau.
Events at the Monastery 2017

**Women’s Retreats**
- Sept. 29-Oct 1          Living as a Christian in Today’s World
- November 3-5           The Psalms: Good Enough for Jesus; Good Enough for Me
- November 24-26         Recognizing Christ
- December 8-10          It’s Time for Hope
- Dec. 31-Jan 1          New Year’s Eve
- February 2-4           Merton Retreat
- February 16-18         Living a Balanced Life
- March 9-11             Women at the Cross
- March 29–April 1       Holy Week Retreat
- May 11-13              The Rosary: A Circular Path to the Center

**Day Retreats for Men and Women**
Most Saturdays of the retreat weekends above are open to men and women 9:00AM-3:30 PM. Lunch is provided.

**Vocation Discernment Retreats**
- October 13-15, January 5-7, April 27-29, August 17-19

**Oblate Meetings** are on Sundays 3:15-5:30 PM.
- September 17, October 22, November TBA, December 3, January 21, February 25, March TBA, April 15, May 6, June 10

For more information go to www.catholicforum.com/bensisnj or call 908-353-3028 to request a brochure or ask a question.

A student spontaneously hugs Sr. Mary Downey as the Benedictine Preschool dedicated an Arbor Day dogwood tree in honor of her service as its first director 1996-2009.