



# *Benedictine Connection*

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St. Benedict's Monastery, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada

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*In spring, the song sings itself.*

Photo—Monastery Grounds

# Message from the Prioress

- Sister Virginia Evard, OSB



Dear Friends,

This year is a very special one for me—the fiftieth anniversary of my monastic profession. So I want to tell you

a very special story—the story of my vocation. Everyone’s vocation story is unique—set in and colored by the particular circumstances of their life and so is mine.

I grew up the second youngest in a family with four sisters and three brothers. My mother died when I was twelve and all of us girls worked for my father in the Evard Jewelry store after school hours when we were in high school. We thought we were a great help to him running errands and doing secretarial work. Only later did I realize that this was his way of taking care of us.

Sometimes on errand trips, I would make visits in downtown churches just as my mother used to do with my younger sister, Tish, and I when we were little. I also loved the opportunity, when it presented itself, to walk home alone from the bus in the evening in, what I now realize, was a contemplative walk.

One evening coming home and gazing at the stars, I felt a call to dedicate my life to God. I remember fully realizing that this would mean I would never have children of my own or a partner for life and that this was a loss. But, I also felt wooed by God, and I could never doubt it. I was sixteen years old and I said, “Yes”.

I even wrote a poem about it. My older sisters all got their diamond engagement rings at my father’s store. In my poem, I saw my diamond in the night sky made by the Creator.

*The certainty of my personal call has seen me through many life changes, although I can't say it made them any easier.*

At first, I thought I would become a Franciscan sister as they taught me in high school. But when I saw a picture of the founding group of sisters of Queen of Peace Monastery in the newsletter of St. Ann’s Mission in Belcourt, North Dakota, I began to write to the novice mistress there. My father used to give regularly to this mission, but he

had not anticipated giving away his daughter, at least not so young.

He wanted me to wait until I graduated from high school, which I did. Of course, then he thought I should take two years of college first, but this I would not do.

My dad came with me by train to North Dakota to check it out. Driving up the hill to the convent, the prioress and novice mistress in the front seat and my dad and I in the back, I suddenly remembered the cigarettes in my purse. My dad, who had disapproved of my smoking, chuckled as I slid them over to him. Then I took the pennies out of my loafers and gave them up, too. Our little impromptu ritual was complete.

Eighteen years later I would be making another trip from North Dakota to Winnipeg, Manitoba in the process of transfer to St. Benedict’s Monastery. As precious as the community in Belcourt had been to me and as fully committed and involved as I had been, I needed a larger community in order to thrive. I have found here a true home for my spirit and a loving community.

Blessings to you in your vocation.

*Sister Virginia Evard, OSB*

100  
Years

## MORE CELEBRATIONS COMING !

We invite you to join us on the continuing journey. . . . .

. . . . . The Benedictine Sisters of Winnipeg are looking forward to an historic and memorable event soon approaching. On **AUGUST 19, 2012**, we celebrate **100 years** since we began as a Monastery, incorporated in the Archdiocese of St. Boniface (which at that time extended to the West coast), and the province of Manitoba. Watch for more information and news in the next two issues of the “*Benedictine Connection*”.

# Remembered with Love

## Sister Christina Wenger, O.S.B.

- Sister Gerarda Pura, OSB



In the early morning of January 25, 2011 at St. Joseph's Residence, two days following her 100th birthday, **Sister Christina Wenger** passed peacefully into everlasting life. She was in her 75th year of monastic profession.

While Sr. Christina was very petite (4 ft. 8 inches tall) she had a large loving heart. With her ever-ready smile, gentle and willing disposition, she peacefully embraced all that life had to offer. She was deeply prayerful and had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

She prayed her rosary daily, alone and with her rosary group. In her later years she could inevitably be heard whispering a Hail Mary.

Sr. Christina entered the Sisters of St. Benedict in Arborg, Manitoba on February 2, 1935 and made her monastic profession on October 27, 1936. She ministered mainly as a cook and housekeeper. She excelled in baking and cake decorating. Her artistic nature extended to liquid embroidery, pottery making and accordion playing. She was a very kind, welcoming person who cherished the special friendships she made while ministering in the Winnipeg convents of Pritchard Avenue and St. John Cantius, the Gimli, Birtle and Winnipegosis hospitals, Sifton, Dog Creek and Calgary, Alberta.

The Vigil Service was held on Friday, January 28, 2011 at St. Bene-

dict's Monastery Chapel. Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated on January 29, 2011 and presided by Msgr. Louis McCloskey with commendation by Sr. Virginia Evard, Prioress. Interment followed in the Monastery cemetery. May she rest in peace. †



Sr. Mary Rose watches while Sr. Virginia reads "Greetings from the Queen" on Sr. Christina's 100th Birthday celebration.

# Honouring our Retired Executive Director, Sr. Gerarda Pura, St. Benedict's Foundation, Inc.

- Diane Huselak

As many of you know, **Sr. Gerarda Pura, OSB** retired as Executive Director of St. Benedict's Foundation February 14, 2011. Sr. Gerarda was appointed Executive Director 15 years ago when the Foundation was first incorporated. Formed to support and enhance the mission and ministries of the Sisters of St. Benedict of St. Benedict's Monastery, the Foundation is a registered charity, separately incorporated from the Sisters of St. Benedict, that has its own board of Directors. Sr. Gerarda has not only elevated the profile of the Benedictine Community, but has changed forever the expectations of what a fundraising organization can achieve. Under her leadership and guidance, St. Benedict's Monastery has made extraordinary strides in all areas of their ministry. The future of St. Benedict's Foundation is bright, and much of the success can be attributed to her vision, work ethic and resourcefulness. We thank Sr. Gerarda for her years of dedicated service to the Foundation and the mission and ministry of the Sisters of the Order

of St. Benedict.

We welcome Sr. Joan Mormul, OSB as the new Executive Director of St. Benedict's Foundation.



At the February 14, 2011 Board of Directors Meeting, tribute was made to Sr. Gerarda on her retirement and Sr. Joan was welcomed as the new Executive Director of the Foundation. Left—Sr Gerarda is presented with a gift from Terry Wong, VP (l) and Tim Burt (r), President of Cardinal Capital Management. Right—Sr. Joan (l) and Sr. Gerarda (r).

# Sr. Virginia Evard, OSB — Woman of Faith & Many Talents

- Sister Gerarda Pura, OSB



Sr. Virginia Evard, prioress of St. Benedict's Monastery and golden Jubilarian, was born on July 1, 1941 in Indianapolis, Indiana to Ruth (Blake) and Richard Evard. The seventh of eight children, she grew up in a loving, close-knit and faith-filled family. Her father was a fifth generation Swiss jeweler and watchmaker. Her mother died young, unfortunately for Sr. Virginia, who was then just 12 years old. Her older sisters took over the mothering role.

Sr. Virginia decided to enter religious life at the age of 16 but deferred her entry until she completed high school in order to please her father. She entered the Queen of Peace Benedictine Community on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, North Dakota. Her

father was a benefactor of St. Ann's Mission where the Benedictine sisters devoted decades of work to the Ojibwa (Chippawa) aboriginal people.

Sr. Virginia was not the only Evard child to have been blessed with a religious vocation. Her older brother Paul had entered the seminary several years earlier and was ordained to the archdiocese of Indianapolis in 1961, the same year that Virginia had made her monastic profession. Fr. Paul went on to become a missionary in Ecuador where he ministered for over 40 years, until his retirement.

Sr. Virginia made her monastic profession on July 1, 1961 and perpetual profession on August 10, 1966 at the Queen of Peace Monastery, Belcourt, North Dakota. In 1977, after much prayer and discernment, she came to Winnipeg and then on March 25, 1980, formally transferred to St. Benedict's Monastery. In 1988 she became a Canadian citizen, retaining her U.S. citizenship as well.

During her 50 years of monastic profession, Sr. Virginia experienced a variety of challenges for growth and opportunities for service. She earned a BA degree from Mount Marty College in Yankton, SD, and a MA degree from Marquette University in English literature, returning to her alma mater in Yankton to teach in the College. In

North Dakota, she served as Religious Education Coordinator and in Formation and Vocation work for the Belcourt community. She received further training in spiritual direction and retreat direction from Columbiere, Clarkston, MI and a Masters in Pastoral Studies from Loyola University, Chicago, IL.

Upon her transfer to Winnipeg she designed and led four Benedictine 30-day retreats, was involved in hospitality, spiritual direction, directed retreats at St. Benedict's Retreat & Conference Centre, serving two terms as Director of the Centre. Sr. Virginia was elected Prioress of St. Benedict's Monastery in 1996 (1996-2000) and again in 2008 (2008-2012). She also continues to facilitate Intensive Journal Workshops, and the Retreat for the Unemployed.

"Ginny" loves graphic arts, has worked in Communications designing and editing the Benedictine Connection, brochures for the Centre, Community Christmas cards and invitations.

She finds monastic life and ministry fulfilling and has always been happy with her life choice and with any of the work she has been called upon to do. She recalls that 50 years ago, when she responded

to God's call, she did so with her whole heart and soul.

She has travelled extensively and even had the opportunity to visit her brother Paul at his mission post in Ecuador.

Virginia loves reading, theatre and enjoys ballet. In her words "she wants for nothing". She looks back on her 50 years of monastic life with deep peace and gratitude for the gifts God has blessed her with—faith, family, friends, talents and above all, her vocation of a life dedicated to God. AD MULTOS ANNOS, Sr. Virginia.



Sr. Virginia (r) making her transfer of vows to St. Benedict's Monastery March 25, 1980.

# World Day of Prayer—Chile

- Sister Joan Mormul, OSB



**O**n Friday, March 2, 2011, the women of Chile invited us to reflect on the many gifts that God has given to each of us – and our call to share those gifts.

We were privileged to have with us for our prayer celebration Ximena Munoz and her sister, Angela, both Chileans, now living in Winnipeg. They shared with us stories of Chil-

ean women, the unique culture and heritage of this beautiful country, and gifted us with home-made Chilean bread – pan amasado.

We joined Christians in more than 170 countries around the world and 2,000 communities across Canada who gathered on world Day of Prayer to pray and act in solidarity with the people of Chile.

Photo—Angela (l) and her sister, Ximena Munoz (r) are seen here in the Monastery Chapel which displayed artifacts from Chile.

## Joint Session of Conferences of Benedictine Prioresses and Abbots

- Sister Virginia Evard, OSB



**The Canadian Contingent:** (l to r) Prioress Barbara Reinhart, OSB of House of Bread Monastery, Nanimo, BC, Abbot John Braganza, OSB of Westminster Abbey, Mission, BC, Prioress Virginia Evard, OSB of St. Benedict's Monastery, Winnipeg, MB and Abbot Peter Novecosky, OSB of St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster, SK

**A**s prioress, I was privileged to attend, along with sixty other prioresses and fifty abbots, the Triennial workshop of Prioresses and Abbots at Marywood Retreat Center in Jacksonville, Florida Feb. 18-22, 2011. Father Michael Casey, OCSO of Tarrawarra Abbey, Australia presented on the topic of initial and ongoing formation for monastics. Father Casey has written on all areas of monastic life and culture. He is widely known for the book: *Strangers to the City*. As presenter

he is loved for his wit and wisdom. The presentation we experienced represents his current research on formation, soon to be published in a new book.

Abbot Primate Notker Wolf, OSB also addressed the group with a global perspective on monastic life. All was not work, though. Sunday we toured historic Catholic sites in St. Augustine, FL followed by a dinner in the city. The annual meeting of the Conference of Prioresses was held Feb. 17-18.

## Lenten Retreat

The Community was graced with a one-week Lenten Retreat directed by Sister Kathryn Huber, OSB. Sr. Kathryn is a member of Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, Indiana. She currently serves as a team member of the community's Spirituality Ministry. She is a spiritual director, leads retreats and workshops, and is involved globally with Benedictine women's communities.



# Highlights



## SABBATICAL GUEST

Sister Margaret Walsh, a member of the Congregation of Notre Dame in Kingston, Ontario, was a sabbatical guest from January to May, 2011. She is seen here enjoying some quality quiet time.



## VISITOR

Above—Sisters Gerarda & Mary with Alexa, a Grade 11 student who came for the day to research Benedictine monasticism.

Right—Alana Levandoski volunteered as a live-in for three months, offering her help wherever needed. Alana, seen here carrying her guitar, entertained employees at the Christmas party.



## VOLUNTEER



## ED DUYCK RETIRES

Sr. Virginia shares some stories during a farewell tea for long-time employee Ed Duyck who retired after working 21 years in Food Service.



## DAUGHTERS OF FAITH

Former student, long time friend and author, Kathy Teillet, does a book signing for *Daughters of Faith*, her history of the Benedictine Sisters in the Province of Manitoba from 1912-1970.



## EMPLOYEE IN-SERVICE

The Sisters are shown here with employees during an In-Service on March 25, 2011. A video by Dewitt Jones entitled *"Celebrate What's RIGHT with the World"* was viewed which utilizes stunning photography and powerful dialogue to help viewers approach their lives with celebration, confidence and grace. Long term service pins were awarded to Pamela Peter, 5 yrs. (middle row 3rd from left), June Danners, 5 yrs. (front row, 2nd from right) and Linda Mc Laughlin, 25 yrs. (missing from photo).

## Retreat & Conference Centre BROCHURE AVAILABLE ONLINE

Our annual Spirituality Brochure is available on our website. If you prefer to receive it that way, please let us know and we will not send a hard copy. Contact St. Benedict's Retreat & Conference Centre at [stbenscentre@mts.net](mailto:stbenscentre@mts.net) and the Spirituality Brochure will be e-mailed to you.

**SAVE THE DATE—Service of Remembrance—  
Sunday November 13, 2011 at the  
Monastery Chapel.**



# Cantaté Fundraising Concert



Photos by Harry Johnson

L. Above—Chuck Peters, Baritone accompanied by Mel Koop, L. Below—Sr. Virginia presenting Cantaté award to Christine Strutt & Marianne Propp (missing from photo).  
Centre—Con Fuoco, St. Mary's Academy Choir directed by Mary Morton

R. Above—Alana Levandoski, R. Below—Lisa Marie Tucker



## Congratulations to the Grand Prize Raffle Winners:

**1st Prize**—BBQ—*Diane Smyth*

**4th Prize**—Handcrafted Quilt—*Gerri Albaness*

**2nd Prize**—Crocheted Bedspread—*Jean Kiazzyk*

**5th Prize**—\$100 Gift Cert. SpaLifestyle—*Sr. Mary Coswin*

**3rd**—\$150 Gift Cert. Tre Visi Restaurant—*Deborah Willits*

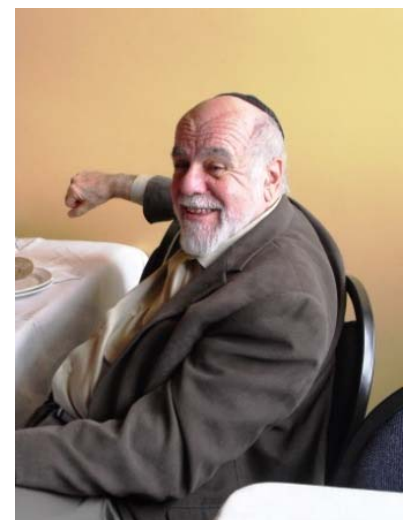
**6th Prize**—\$100 Gift Basket—*Elsie Shaw*

Thank you to the donors: [West Kildonan Auto Service](#), [Margaret Clark](#), [Vic Janzen](#), [Elsie Shaw](#), [Mayor Bruce](#)



## Retreat and Conference Centre Activities

- Sister Mary Coswin, OSB



Left—**Shekinah**—Spiritual Direction training program graduates and co-directors: Back row- Nancy Phillips, Suzanne Morris, (David Walsh, co-director), Rachel Twigg Boyce, Janelle Schneider; Front row - (Sr. Mary Coswin, co-director), Judy Vermette, Claire Michaud & Beatrice Vouriot.

Centre—**Manitoba Prairie Quilters** workshop held in January, 2011.

Right—**Rabbi Neal Rose** facilitated a one-day workshop *The New testament through Jewish Eyes* on Sunday, November 21st, 2010. Participants reflected on the life, death and teachings of Yeshua, with special attention paid to the Lord's Prayer.

**Centre Wish List**— We are in need of: \*stacking lawn chairs \*a bagless vacuum cleaner \*a couple of floor lamps \*volunteers to help deliver brochure packets to parishes this summer and \*occasional help with housecleaning at large turnover times.

## Invitation to Worship

Morning Prayer Mon.-Fri. 7:00 am Sat. 9:00 am Sun. 10:00 am  
Midday Prayer Daily 11:50 am  
Evening Prayer Daily 5:00 pm  
(No Evening Prayer in Chapel on Wednesday)

Eucharist Sunday 11:00 am OR anticipated Sat. 7:00 p.m.  
Tues., Wed. & Thurs. 9:00 a.m.

**Exposition of Blessed Sacrament with Adoration on Sisters' Retreat Sunday — last Sunday of month, 2:00 – 4:00 pm**

Times may change. Please phone 338-4601 to check.

### Privacy Policy

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The Monastery and the Foundation rely on the generosity of their supporters and friends. Supporters and friends always have the right to be removed from our mailing list or be exempt from specific communication from us. Please contact the Monastery or the Foundation or look at our website for more information about these matters.

## Upcoming Events



**Reflective Leadership Informed by Reflective Living with Dr. George Bilotta — Sept. 16-18, 2011.** This seminar is intended for Leaders and Teams. The seminar will first introduce participants to the core disposition of Reflective Living which support the principles of Reflective Leadership. Participants will receive practical and effective ways to integrate and implement the seminar material in the particular leadership arena. Early registration fee available.

**The Celtic Heart Within— with Monica Brown and Hilary Musgrave, Oct. 21-23, 2011.** Participants will be drawn into a deeper awareness and appreciation of Celtic spirituality through creative reflection and ritual, story and imagery, music and song. A unique opportunity to touch the Celtic Heart within ourselves. Pre-register with deposit ASAP, confirm registration by Oct. 7th.



**I'd Say Yes, God If I Knew What You Wanted,** a Discernment workshop, **Feb. 17, evening and 18, 2012** with Dr. Nancy Reeves. Open to all.

**Coming Attractions - Robert Wicks April 27-28, 2012; Don Bisson October 18-19, 2012**

Call the Retreat & Conference Centre to Register 339-1705

*Benedictine Connection* is published twice a year by the Sisters of St Benedict, St. Benedict's Monastery, Winnipeg, MB Canada and is distributed free of charge to relatives and friends of the community.

Newsletter Committee: Diane Huselak— Editor, Sr. Mary Coswin, Sr. Catherine Labinowich, Sr. Joan Mormul.

Many thanks to all who have contributed to the newsletter by way of articles or photos.

For the love of the earth, this newsletter is printed on recycled paper without an envelope.

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