

Monastery of St. Clare Summer, 2009 Newsletter

SECULAR FRANCISCANS HERE



On the weekend of August 28-30, the Secular Franciscans of Our Lady of the Rockies Region gathered in Great Falls for their annual retreat. Saturday of that weekend was spent at the monastery, with meetings in the gathering room and Mass in the chapel. During this retreat, seven men and women from Great Falls began their candidacy as Secular Franciscans. They have begun an 18-month formation time during which they will learn more about Sts. Francis and Clare, what it means to be a Franciscan, the history of the Franciscans, and their responsibilities as members of an Order in the Church.

Visitors...

When people walk through the entrance to our monastery, they usually tell us that they feel a great sense of peace and tranquility here. That seems to draw many for meetings or daylong retreats in our gathering rooms, and quiet prayer time or Mass in the chapel. Our guest rooms are also being used by persons who are looking for some silence and solitude, as well as those who might need accommodations for a meeting here in Great Falls. Please keep in mind that these spaces are available for individuals or groups who may need them.

And Friends and Benefactors

As Christmas approaches, our grateful thoughts turn to all of you who have been so generous in your support. Your donations help us to pay our bills, and keep the house going till the end of the month. Your gifts of food and household items often come just when they are most needed. Your gifts of service, too, are greatly appreciated. Yard work, and tasks that call for someone with more strength than ours(!) were done, and we wonder how we would have managed without such fine people. Our anniversary celebration would not have been possible without a dedicated team of volunteers whose spirited generosity amazed us.

All of you are remembered in our prayer each day,

often by name. We are so grateful to you for the trust you have placed in us and in our prayer. May God continue to reward you for all you do!

10th Anniversary Celebration



Our tenth anniversary picnic on August 22nd was a beautiful, sunny day in every way. Our front yard, converted into picnic grounds, was filled with good friends who came to celebrate this happy occasion. Bishop Michael Warfel and Father Jay Peterson concelebrated Mass at noon, while a choir made up of volunteers from several parishes led the music. Then other friends, who own the Golden Corral restaurant in town, began serving a most enjoyable picnic lunch. There were games and raffles, and the renewing of many friendships as the crowd of about 300 relaxed in our front yard or toured the monastery.

The planning committee had organized everything so well that it was a delightful day for all. The cleanup crew was so efficient that everything was back to normal, even tents carted away, by 6 p.m., and the monastery returned to its customary quiet. How grateful we are for the friends God has given us!





Advent ~ Season of Light

Advent is a special time in the Church and in our monastery, a time for preparing to celebrate the feast of the birth of Jesus Christ. After centuries of waiting for the One who would bring freedom from slavery, from want, from the powerful enemies surrounding God's Chosen People, the Messiah did come. The big surprise was that he came as a child, a newborn infant, just like us—but he was also God.

The wonder of God becoming human, living in our midst, is what Christmas is all about. Even more wonderful is that Jesus continues to be with us and within us every day, in every moment. He is with us to free us from our sins and our fears, to reassure us that his love is always with us, surrounding us like loving arms.

If you would like to enter into this Advent time of deeper awareness, you might want to spend some extra time with the Lord. We invite you to come and join us for Evening Prayer on each of the Sundays of Advent at 5:30 in our chapel. If Sunday is not a good day for you, come on any weekday except Fridays at 5:15 p.m. We would love to share this special prayer of the Church with you.

Discerning...

Many of you have seen and met Veronica, who was with us recently for a month. She is discerning God's call in her life, whether she is meant to join our community as a Poor Clare, and so she was experiencing our life with us. She has returned to her home in California, but will return again for a longer visit. We ask you to pray for her as she continues to search out God's plan for her.

Our Enclosure

On many occasions, we have been asked if we visit patients in the hospital or families involved with Hospice. Because we are members of a canonical contemplative Order, the Church requires us to observe enclosure, or cloister. In her wisdom, the church asks this in order to safeguard our life of prayer which is the specific ministry that is ours in the Church. It is not an easy concept for many people to grasp, but a belief in the primacy of prayer helps one to understand. Of course, because of personal and communal needs, especially regarding our presence at Liturgy, we must make exceptions. We weigh the importance of exceptions in light of our vocation as Poor Clares.

New Garb for Poor Clares

When the Poor Clares came to Great Falls, Montana from four different monasteries, the plan was that we would make matching habits once we were here and settled. But life became very busy as we worked to establish ourselves as a new foundation, and our "interim habit", a brown skirt and white blouse, became the norm. After ten years, though, it was time to carry out our original plan. With the expert help of Sister Rita Cheong of the Cincinnati Poor Clares, we spent one week diligently cutting, pinning and sewing, and we now have the Poor Clare habit we wanted from the beginning. If you see some women wearing a khaki brown dress with a knotted white cord for a belt, you will know that the Poor Clare sisters are now wearing the traditional brown habit and white cord that Poor Clares and other Franciscans have worn for centuries.



Back: Sisters Barbara Gerlach (Chesterfield, NJ), Clare Frances McAvoy (Jamaica Plain, MA); Front: Sisters Jane Sorenson, Catherine Cook, Judith Ann Crosby, Carolyn Forgette (Travelers Rest, SC), Maryalice Pierce

Elections

Soon after we began wearing our new habit, three Poor Clares, members of the Council of Holy Name Federation of Poor Clares, came for a visit and witnessed our triennial elections. It was a delight to have Sisters Clare Frances, Barbara and Carolyn with us for a few days, to catch up on news of our other monasteries, and show them a little bit of Montana's natural beauty. Oh, yes—Sister Catherine was elected abbess for the next three years.

We ask your prayers that we will continue to grow as women of prayer and a loving community.

