

OUR LADY OF THE MISSISSIPPI ABBAY

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monastery news

When we closed our last newsletter just before opening our Jubilee year in July, we had no idea how deeply meaningful and important July would be for our community. Our Sister Regina became very ill as the last newsletter went to press, and by early July it was clear that she was dying. Her last weeks were very peaceful for her as we cared for her here at the Abbey, surrounded not only by us, but also her two sisters, a nephew, and the Sisters from other monasteries who were already planning to be here for our Jubilee on July 11. Because Sr. Regina had known most of our guests all of her monastic life, their presence in her final days was a great comfort both to her and to them. She died on Monday, July 14 at the end of Vespers.

Sr. Regina Keating was born on May 27, 1927, in Brooklyn, New York. She began her Cistercian monastic life at Mt. St. Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, Massachusetts on August 22, 1952, made her first profession in 1954, and her final profession in 1957. Asked to go on the new foundation, Our Lady of

the Mississippi Abbey, she came to Dubuque on October 18, 1964 with the 12 other founding sisters. In our first years she was our cook, a marvelous cook, and over the years was in charge

of various departments: liturgy, archives, wardrobe, and especially, for many years, the shipping for our candy business. In September, 2004, we celebrated her Golden Jubilee of profession with a special Mass and dinner with her family and our monks of New Melleray Abbey. We miss her sense of humor, her insights in our daily life, her marvelous soprano voice, and her deep enjoyment of the abundant bird life on our property.

Having one of our foundresses dying during our Jubilee celebration was both unexpected and profoundly fitting. We were

celebrating God's love and mercy during 50 years of monastic life here in our Abbey, in our community, and Sr. Regina's death underlined for all of us the goal of our life, which is God, life in God eternally. There was a beautiful rhythm as we moved from gathering to share memories of



Sr Regina Keating



*Standing: Sr Lillian, Sr Gen, Sr Marjoe, Sr Gail, Betty Ann Kuhn;
sitting: Sr Mary Ann, Sr Joan, Sr Elizabeth OP*

our first days here at Mississippi Abbey, to slipping in to Sr. Regina's room one or two at a time, and sharing in her growing peace and joy as she anticipated our Lord's immanent coming for her. We were especially grateful to Sr. Regina's family for taking care of her when we gathered for our times of sharing, meals and Jubilee Mass.

As we mentioned in our last newsletter, the opening event of our Jubilee year was a monastic gathering, and we will close the year on July 11, 2015 with a special Mass with our local church and friends. Our monastic celebration was the smaller of the two, and wasn't that fortunate! The first need was to gather our far-flung original foundresses. Here at Mississippi Abbey we had Srs. Regina, Gail, Mary Ann and Joan, with our first superior, M. Columba, and Sr. Augustine who have gone before us into eternal life. We also have two foundresses at our monastery at Tautra, Srs. Rosemary and Marjoe. Two other foundresses are still part of our abbey but live as hermits elsewhere: Srs. Gen and Lillian. Another foundress was Sr. Elizabeth Barribeau, who had earlier been a Dominican, and eventually returned to them. Fortunately she lives right across the Mississippi River from us, and was able to attend. Another foundress, Betty Ann, was in temporary vows, and she was with us one year before returning home and has stayed in contact with us all through the years. Another foundress also returned home soon after the foundation, and she has since died. So it was quite a feat to get everyone here, and all our



Srs Mary Ann and Marjoe remember the early days.



Sr Gen, Sr Gail and Sr Elizabeth

living foundresses made it except Sr. Rosemary, who had visited us for a month the previous year. In her place, Tautra sent Sr. Lisbeth, who was one of the first new members of our monastery. In addition to our foundresses, we had the superiors or other sisters from the other four monasteries of nuns here in the U.S.

Everyone was here by July 10, when we began our jubilee with a gathering with our foundresses and some of the senior monks at New Melleray Abbey who worked so hard to help us in our early days. All afternoon we listened as they shared some of the events of the first days and weeks here on our hill top. For those of us who were not foundresses, it was a rare treat to listen as our senior monks and nuns went from



Sr Regina and her two sisters, Anne and Regina Jaroncyk

memory to memory. Our foundress M. Gail recalls one such memory from one of our brothers that was true, funny and delightful all at the same time. "In the first few days of the sisters' arrival in Dubuque the monks of New Melleray invited us to have a meal with them in the guest house and to visit with them. Most of them had never met a Trappistine, and though we knew monks from Spencer Abbey near Wrentham, this was different. We went into the meeting room and found all the monks lined up against the wall on one side and we nuns were all lined up on the other side. It was pretty hilarious. Then one brave monk walked over to greet a sister and that broke the ice. And it has remained nicely broken all these fifty years. The monks are wonderful brothers and friends." Another memorable detail was having to wait more than a few days for all the household goods and clothing to arrive! Thanks to a kind benefactor, our sisters were flown from Massachusetts to Dubuque, but everything else was shipped. Fortunately some of the other religious congregations here in Dubuque came to our rescue and either lent or gave us what we needed. To help us remember those days, our archivist, Sr. Kathleen, had prepared displays of photos, news clippings, and artifacts from our archives. It was a wonderful afternoon, ending with Vespers and a superb cookout.

July 11, the feast of St. Benedict, was a very full day. After Lauds we gathered with our guests to give our foundresses our thanks to them for their sacrifices for our abbey, and some little

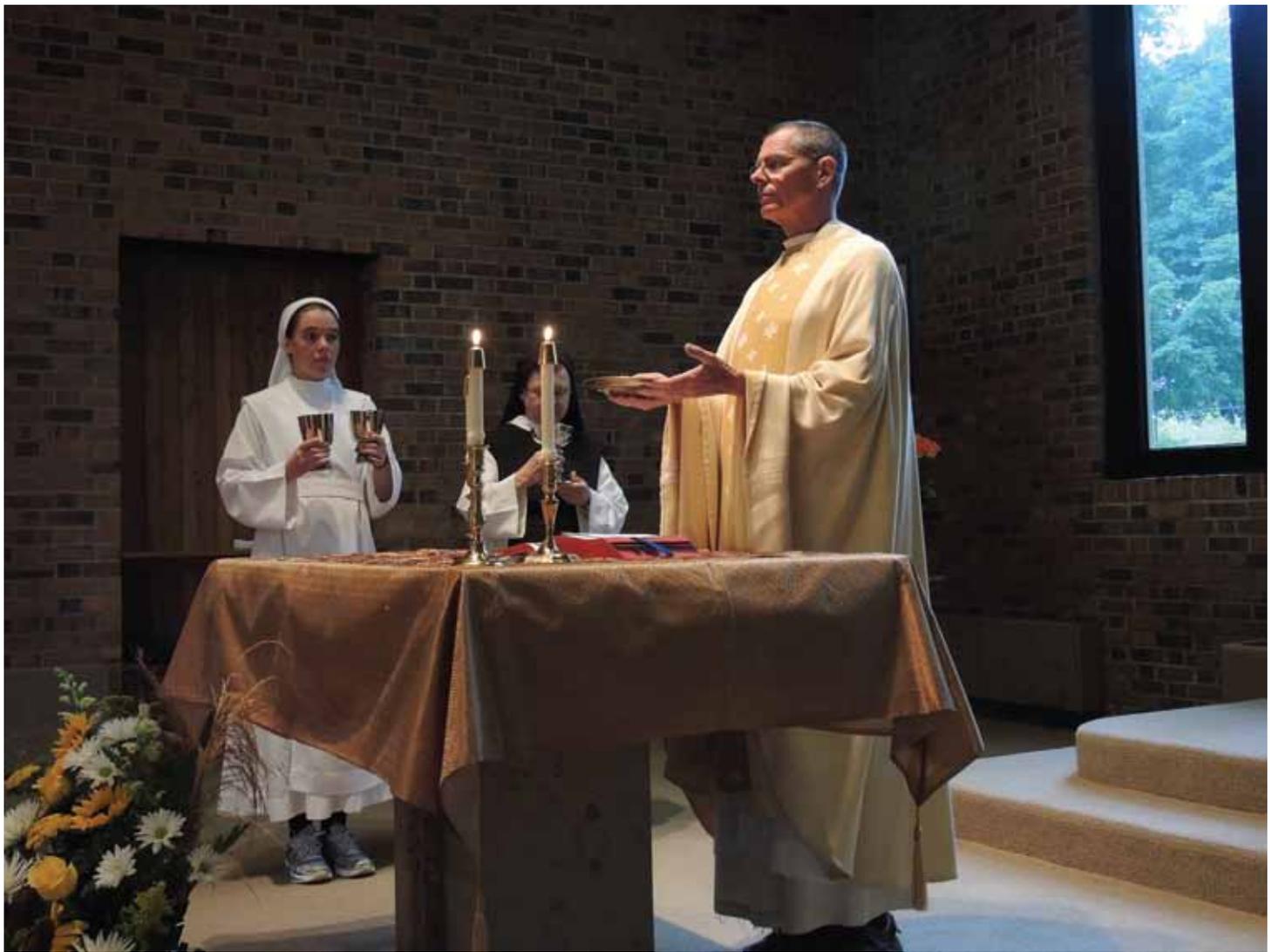


The funeral procession approaches our cemetery.



Sisters start filling the grave.

tokens of our gratitude. This was the unveiling of our jubilee mug. It is a lovely simple design and big enough to hold plenty of coffee or tea. Now we are all using them in our refectory! Then at 10:30 we celebrated Mass with many of our brothers from New Melleray present, and presided by their superior, Dom Mark Scott. Our church was very full of monks and nuns, and their presence was very affirming and supportive. After Mass we all proceeded to our refectory to enjoy a lovely dinner and a few toasts to our foundresses and a few more memories from the monks. Later in the afternoon Sr. Chris showed a slide presentation of photos throughout the years.



The Jubilee Mass: Srs Mary Therese and Kathy present the gifts to Fr Mark Scott

Our celebration continued after a little rest with Vespers and supper. Some of the monks stayed for this and were a great asset for two very funny skits after supper. First, Fr. Brendan wrote a spoof in which he, as Jim Lear of the Jim Lear Show, interviewed two investigative reporters who had been sent to check the veracity of the marketing of all our nuns' monasteries' industries. Since we had Sisters from all four of the other monasteries present, no one was spared from Fr. Brendan's sense of humor. Even the two investigators could not give their reports without laughing. Needless to say, we are sure that Wrentham's famous Munch does not contain 40% cardboard! The second skit was based on some foundations fortunately never made as possible alternatives to our own. One was a monastery for the surfer scene in California in the 60's, for

example. Betty Ann, the novices from New Melleray, Fr. Jonah, our novice Sr. Mary Therese, and several other sisters made this skit one to remember with their creativity! After more memories and a clever poem by Sr. Myra, we ended the day singing the Salve Regina at Sr. Regina's bedside with her family. The day was filled with vibrant liturgy, deep thankfulness to God, mutual joy, and a profound awareness of Sr. Regina's journey towards heaven.

Many of our guests were still here when, on July 13, we gathered in Sr. Regina's room for the prayers for the dying, but all had left before she died. Her wake was the evening of the 16th, when she was brought into the church. We took turns staying in the church with her during the night, with at least two always present, slowly reciting the Psalter out loud, and praying quietly. Her



The Jubilee Mass

funeral was the next morning. Sr. Regina had many friends, especially among the other communities of sisters in Dubuque, and many were able to come to either the wake or funeral.

In the midst of death, there is always new life. On July 15 our brothers at New Melleray elected Dom Mark Scott as their abbot, and we all went to New Melleray on the 16th for a noon meal to celebrate this special event in their life.

The last big event of July was Sr. Mary Ann finally getting a much needed knee replacement, followed later by foot surgery. We are happy to report that she is walking much better now, though she still needs her walker. Otherwise, the rest of 2014 passed quietly. Once again, we had a good “candy season” with sales that provide us with our basic living expenses for the coming year. We are so grateful to our volunteers and employees who help us, and to our candy customers.



Frs Brendan and David, past abbots of New Melleray, with M.Kathy of Redwoods and Sr Marjoe

It will be Lent by the time this newsletter is mailed. We wish each one of you a blessed Lent and a glorious Easter filled with the joy of our Risen Lord. Our next newsletter will cover the closing celebration of our Jubilee.

The Sisters of Mississippi Abbey



18 October 1964: our founding sisters, with M. Angela and Sr Cecile of Wrentham, and Fr Thomas Keating of Spencer, arrive at our monastery. M. Columba, superior of the new monastery, carries the foundation cross.