



Scenes from our land



Speaking of magazines and of Iowa – the magazine *Our Iowa*, which has a large circulation (90,000 – even more than our newsletter! 😊) is also doing a new series, short articles on Iowans who do interesting things. The sample they showed us was of a man who restores old tractors (now, there’s Iowa!). We will be featured in their December issue – a great time for us.

Finally, we are expecting to be featured on the Today Show! A one-woman producer and crew came out in July to do the story. The latest we hear from her is that she is hoping it will air the day after Thanksgiving – so be sure to check it out!

OK, we know a lot of you are wondering about those sea-salt caramels we mentioned in our last newsletter. It

generated more comments than the previous 20 newsletters combined. It’s amazing how much work goes into a new product, EVEN one that uses the same equipment and even packaging of something we already produce. We had to try out various sea-salts, learn what’s the trick to putting it on the candy (there isn’t any, unfortunately), ask the FDA about temporary labeling, test if the salt affects the tempering of the chocolate over time, test if the salt falls off during shipping, etc. This year we plan to produce 1,000 boxes, and then see if they sell well enough to make them a permanent Item.

We wish you a blessed Thanksgiving, with much for which to thank God!

The Sisters of Mississippi Abbey

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OF THE
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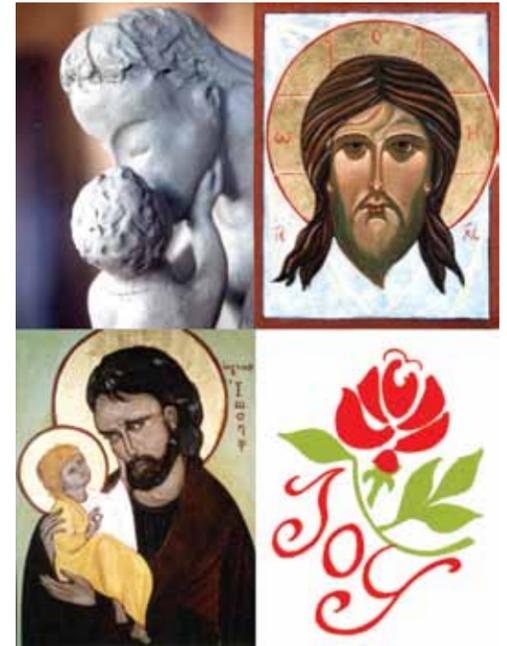
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Sr Mary Ann Sullivan OCSO.



Sr Mary Ann's art.

In our last newsletter we mentioned that our four oldest sisters would all be turning 80 within the next 12 months. Well, “man proposes, God disposes.” Our Sr Mary Ann Sullivan, who would have led the pack by turning 80 in July, went home to God to celebrate there instead.

Mary Ann Sullivan was born on July 20, 1937, the oldest in a family of nine children. The question “where are you from?” generally stymied her, because they lived for substantial periods in widely different locations: Maryland, Missouri, Connecticut. After studying art at Catholic University in Washington DC for two years, Mary Ann entered our motherhouse, Mt St Mary’s Abbey in Wrentham, Massachusetts in 1957, and made her solemn profession in 1962.

Wrentham was bursting at the seams with young sisters, and in October 1964 sent thirteen, including Sr Mary Ann, to found Mississippi Abbey. In our critical early years she served as cellarer, in charge of all the maintenance and supplies of the monastery. We change jobs with some regularity, so her service to the community eventually included gardening, sacristan, and liturgy planning. Sr Mary Ann’s artistic abilities were put to practical use: for over 30 years she designed our annual community Christmas card, carefully silk-screening each one. Even dearer to her heart was the writing of icons, at which she became sufficiently experienced to begin selling them in the 1990’s.



Photo/Bill Witt

Sisters keep watch in church with Sr Mary Ann's body.

When she was only in her 50's Sr Mary Ann was beset with a number of physical problems which she bore cheerfully as they gradually worsened. Troubles with her feet meant walking became increasingly painful; and she lost the fine motor skills necessary for icon writing, as arthritis invaded her hands. Worst in some ways was the deterioration of her hearing. Now, you might think that in a silent Trappist monastery that would not matter; but it meant she often could not hear the readings in church, or the long readings that accompany our daily community dinner, or participate well at community gatherings.

In February, Sr Mary Ann suddenly became unable to stand. The next few months saw frequent hospital stays, as well as times in rehabilitation to help her stand and walk again. Although each recovery was followed by another setback, it still came as a shock to us when we learned she was dying, her body just worn out and no longer able to fight off infections. We brought her home for her last days; she could not speak, but as she was carried in she mouthed the words, "happy, happy!" This last verbal communication to us beautifully expressed her gratitude to be back in the monastery, surrounded by her sisters as she made the great passage from this life to the next. Until her illness her mind was clear enough to read the theological tomes that were her joy, and even in the hospital she was reading her beloved Pope Francis. On May 13, after First Vespers of Sunday, Sr Mary Ann went to meet Him of whom she had read and dreamed.



Photo/Bill Witt

We place a sheet over the body before lowering it in the grave.

GENERAL CHAPTER

Within our Order, the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (a/k/a "Trappists"), the ultimate authority belongs not to a person, but to the General Chapter, the periodic meeting of all the superiors. For centuries only the abbots of the men's houses took part; it was only in 2011, after a few decades of experimentation, that the abbesses became full participants.

Back in the 12th century, when St Stephen Harding first instituted the General Chapter, it met annually for a couple of weeks. Travel was of course far more difficult, and it could take many weeks for an abbot to make the trip to Citeaux in France, especially from the more remote houses in Scandinavia or Eastern Europe. Frequently fewer than half of the abbots actually showed up. Now with the modern ease of communication in between chapters, the chapter itself (lasting 3 week) is held only every third year. But the participants are now arriving from every inhabited continent!

This September our General Chapter met in Assisi, Italy; M. Rebecca attended, and our Sr Grace went as a secretary. This Chapter had an especially beautiful spirit of peace and mutual help, and brought to fruition the work of several previous Chapters trying to assist monasteries in critical situations. On her return, M. Rebecca told us what a difference it made how the community responded to the advice given by past Chapters. Those who listened and took the Chapter's recommendations to heart often had an important turn-around and began a new path of generativity. But those who preferred to continue their old paths remain in a precarious situation. Are we open to what the Holy Spirit tells us, and willing to change?



Photo/Bill Witt

CANDY ADVENTURES

Our candy business supports us well, but it has never really recovered from the recession that started 10 years ago. We have never done much by way of marketing; for years, our annual catalogue mailed to all our customers was about the extent of it, eventually joined by a website and now the occasional email blast.

This year we have done something new. Loras College, a small Catholic college here in Dubuque, has a marketing department. It's great for their students to work with a real business, and also potentially a source of some good ideas for us. So we have had several projects with them, including hiring a marketing intern (funded largely by a grant) who is working hard to get us some new customers.

LIKE our candy on Facebook (Monastery Candy) and check us out on Instagram (Monastery_Candy).



Photo/Paul Green

Back in the dark ages when magazines and newspapers flourished, we occasionally bought an ad, but our general experience was that it rarely even paid for itself. The publicity that came to us by God's Providence, for which we paid not a penny, was generally our best source of new customers – an article in the Des Moines Register that was syndicated nation-wide; a 15-minute segment shown repeatedly on the Food Channel; a brief highly favorable mention in the Washington Post.

This year Iowa Public Television launched a web-video series, "Greetings from Iowa." Episode 8, entitled "Monastery Chocolates" (they don't like to use the actual name) is a 7-minute video, very nicely done, about our candy business. Actually, you might enjoy some of their other shows too – they have one on a guy who makes kaleidoscopes, one on hot-air balloon competitions... Apparently they are focusing on the non-farm aspects of our state, to help people see Iowa is not just about corn and hogs. We're proud to be representing our state early in the series. AND we hear our program will be broadcast on regular TV a couple of times in November.