



Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey
8400 Abbey Hill • Dubuque, Iowa 52003

Phone: 1-563-582-2595

E-mail: anna@olmabbey.org

Website: mississippiabbey.org

Candy phone: 1-563-556-6330

Candy website: monasterycandy.com

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OUR LADY
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The Mississippi Abbey community



Sr Carol



Sr Ann Marie



Sr Gail

We've been promising our readers news of 80th birthdays for the last year, and we are pleased finally to report that yes, our three oldest members have all turned over another zero and entered the glorious 80's. As mentioned in our last letter, God called our oldest sister at the time, Sr Mary Ann, to celebrate her 80th birthday in heaven, but Srs Carol, Gail and Ann Marie are still with us on Planet Earth. In the short time between October and January all three had birthdays, so we now have an age span from the 20's to the 80's. So far, we've never had a member reach 90, but our octogenarians are all going strong, so we are hoping!



Making candy

Did you catch our little appearance on *The Today Show*? A one-woman production crew came out in July for a single morning, filmed us at work, interviewed a few sisters, and voila, on Tuesday November 28 we were featured in a 2-minute segment on the national version of the show. In short order, not only did our website crash from overload, but the server which hosts our site and 60 other sites also crashed. Our excellent tech people had us back up and running in a few hours. Need we add, we got a *lot* of additional candy orders?

The funny thing was, 2017 was the year we decided to make a real effort at marketing ourselves. Mainly this meant hiring an intern from our local Catholic college, Loras. We've had tons of bright ideas for marketing projects but never the time actually to implement any of them. Our intern, Nicole Kuboushek, not only got a lot of those projects done, but had some good creative ideas of her own. And one of her ventures, a short ad on a local radio station, got such a good response that this too succeeded in crashing our site! Which however recovered all on its own this time. We kept up production until mid-December, and at this point let all our inventory sell out.

If you haven't seen the *Today Show* clip, we have a link to it on our candy website (monasterycandy.com), as well as a link to something we like even better! As we mentioned in our last letter, Iowa Public TV inaugurated a new series, *Greetings from Iowa*, and the eighth episode, 7-minutes long, features us. Although this program too focuses on our candy business, it also shows something of the rest of our life. We were pleased to hear the series was nominated for three regional Emmys and won a National Educational Telecommunications Association award.



Sr Christina, 3rd from the front, joined our handbell choir at Christmas.

Of course, publicity generates publicity, and only days after the *Today Show* airing we received a call from ABC, wanting to feature us on their program *Made in America*. With our inventory running out, we had no hesitation in declining an offer we would normally have been most grateful to receive. ABC contacted our sisters of Mt St Mary Abbey in Wrentham Massachusetts, the community which founded our monastery in 1964 and taught us the candy business. Their program aired in mid-December, and we hear they too were overwhelmed by the response. Thank God we declined!

As candy wound down we turned toward the more delightful matter of celebrating Jesus' birth. Our Christmas this year was made special by the presence of one of the new members of our daughter house in Norway, Tautra Mariakloster. For those of you who may be new readers, in 1999 we sent six of our sisters, joined by a Norwegian sister from the Wrentham community, to start a "new" monastery on the island of Tautra in the Trondheim fjord. Our Order had four monasteries in Norway in the Middle Ages, and one of them was on this very island; the ruins are still visible.

Norway has only a tiny percentage of Catholics, and the first woman to join Tautra and persevere to final vows was Sr Christina, from the Netherlands. In December Sr Christina was in New York with three other Tautra sisters for fundraising purposes, and afterward she came to Iowa for two weeks, for her first visit to the mother house. It was a great joy to come to know her and to strengthen the ties between our communities. We see God's hand at work as this offshoot of ours flourishes and receives new members.



Sr Harriet

Speaking of new members, we have a new novice! Harriet Pedersen grew up in upstate New York but went to college at St Olaf's in Minnesota, where she entered the Catholic Church and discovered our community. St Olaf is the patron saint of Norway, so we now have another bond with this saint. Please pray for our new novice!

In January we had another tree harvest handled by a logging company from Bellevue, a small town a few miles south of us. Well over half of our 650 acres of land is woodlands, and we plant a good deal more than we cut. The last harvest was four years ago, and covered only a portion of our woodlands. This winter our forester selected over 150 more black walnuts in the remaining stands of trees to be harvested. By removing these over-mature trees we are giving the smaller trees more space and light to develop.



Sisters hiking through our woods

After the trees were cut the huge logs lay in piles in our fields for weeks. You could see the piles in the distance below from our refectory, which has a great view over our own land and into neighboring states. We were impressed that a customer of the logging company came all the way from Germany to select his own logs. Apparently in the days of the internet even Bellevue Iowa is involved in international trade!

Although we are just coming up to Holy Week as we write, by the time the letter goes through pre-press and printing and mailing it will be well past Easter. We wish you much joy in the Risen Lord!

The Sisters of Mississippi Abbey