Sisters Train for Discernment Process
By Sister Mariette Thérèse Bernier, OSB

Saint Benedict says “Goodness of life and wisdom in teaching must be the criteria for choosing the one to be made abbot.” RB 64:2 Because the role of abbot/prioress is so important, it calls for a period of discernment before electing someone. Unlike the culture of today’s society, this does not entail lobbying and speeches. Rather, it is a process that calls on the Holy Spirit to help community members discover God’s will. It involves discerning the goals and direction of the community as well as deciding who can lead the community best at a particular point in time.

In order for the discernment process for the election of a prioress to run smoothly, one or two sisters are invited from other communities to serve as facilitators. In August, 23 sisters from 13 different monasteries gathered at St. Walburga Monastery in Elizabeth, NJ for three days to receive training for the facilitation process. The training was led by Sister Joella Kidwell, Sister Mary Catherine Wenstrup and Sister Cecelia Dwyer. Sister Sharon McHugh and Sister Mariette Thérèse Bernier from St. Walburga Monastery were among the trainees.

After three long days of listening, learning and gathering information, the group took an evening stroll through Liberty State Park in Jersey City, NJ before heading back to their respective monasteries.
Monastic Resident Reflects on Program
By Maureen Scanlon

I am both blest and honored to have had the opportunity to participate in the Monastic Residence Program at Saint Walburga Monastery for two separate month long unique experiences (Jan. 2016 & Jan. 2017).

Immersing myself in the daily life of the monastic community of these most welcoming sisters has helped me to find peace, joy and rest. Attending prayer and Mass with 20 sisters beautifully chanting the Divine Office allowed me to transcend effortlessly into a deeper sense of self and a deeper connection to God, and to come away with renewed energy and clarity.

I leave the monastery and the monastic program with a deeper understanding of the importance of balance, balance of prayer and work in everyday life. I also leave with much appreciation to the sisters for their dedication to the Benedictine life.

I am especially grateful to Sister Mariette Thérèse, the Monastic Residence Program director, for all the assistance she has given to me during my time at the monastery. She is truly a wonderful director and mentor.
We, the Benedictine Sisters of Saint Walburga Monastery, Elizabeth, NJ, are monastic women who seek God in community through the Gospel and the Rule of Saint Benedict.

We live our monastic conversion sustained by the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, lectio divina, and presence to one another.

Through active lives balanced by contemplation we witness to Jesus Christ in community, hospitality, and ministry.

Catholic Schools Week was January 29 - February 4. It seemed a fitting time to acknowledge our sisters who work in Catholic Schools.

Sister Sharon McHugh, President of Benedictine Academy, is active in administration and development for her high school Alma Mater. She is pictured receiving a memento on teacher appreciation day during Catholic Schools Week at the Academy.

Sister Marcia Lammerding works for the Union County Educational Services commission as a compensatory education teacher assisting students in math at St Mary’s High School in Elizabeth and Roselle Catholic High School in Roselle, NJ. She is pictured checking schedule changes on Career Day at Saint Mary’s High School.

Sister Rosemary Kenny teaches second grade, and Sister Roberta McDonald is the technology coordinator at Our Lady of Guadalupe Academy, one of two Catholic elementary schools in the city of Elizabeth. They are pictured with second graders who proudly demonstrate their work.

Sister Diane Marie Kestler serves as receptionist/secretary in the Superintendent of Schools office in the Newark Archdiocesan Center.

Sister Lauren Trinh is an administrative assistant in St. Mary’s Elementary School in Newark which is conducted by the monks of Newark Abbey.

Sister Mariette Thérèse Bernier is the school counselor at St. James the Apostle School, Springfield, NJ. Students honored her 11 years at the school and demonstrated their affection at an assembly where they each held up “Sr. Mariette on a stick” and sang “You Have a Friend in Me.”

Presence and invitation are two important words when it comes to a religious vocation. Most women and men in religious life recall the presence of a sister, brother or priest somewhere along their path and many also recall the first time someone asked them if they had ever considered entering a religious community. While striving to encourage those who may have a calling, vocation directors endeavor to promote presence where possible and gently invite those interested to ask questions, dialogue and visit.

On the national level, a unique event occurred to spread the message of vocations. At the biannual convocation of the National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC), Deacon Pedro Guevara-Mann of Salt + Light TV led a live-stream interactive conversation with a panel of young religious. Questions were submitted not only by the audience but also through Facebook and Twitter by those watching. The event, entitled “So You Think You’ve Been Called?,” was watched by over 6500 viewers.

On the Diocesan level, vocation directors speak about religious vocations to high school students giving them an opportunity to engage with religious, find out about the life and ask any questions they may have. Sister Mariette Thérèse recently visited Morris Catholic High School, Union Catholic High School and of course Benedictine Academy.

At St. Walburga Monastery, four Vocation Discernment Retreats are offered each year. These retreats give discerners the opportunity to experience the rhythm of the monastic schedule by inviting them to join the Community for Eucharist, prayers and a meal each day. Discussions on discernment and religious life are enhanced with periods of quiet and reflection. The next Vocation Discernment Retreats will take place April 28-30 and August 18-20, 2017.
Did You Know That...

- On October 2, Sister Marita Funke spoke about "Mary, Model of Mercy" at the Rosary Society Communion breakfast at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Hackensack, NJ.
- Sister Marlene Milasus attended the treasurers Meeting of the Resource Center for Religious Institutes in Anaheim, CA, October 11-14.
- Sr. Mariette Thérèse Bernier spoke on the topic of "Prayer" to the RCIA candidates at St. Catharine Parish in Glen Rock on October 17, 2016. In November, Sister Marlene Milasus spoke to the class about Eucharist.
- Sisters Rosemary Kenny, Marita Funke, and postulant Christina Sorrentino attended the October East Coast Benedictine Formation Conference at St. Benedict Monastery in Bristow, VA. Fr. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, of St. Meinrad Abbey, Ferdinand, IN, spoke on Obedience.
- Sisters, Marlene Milasus, Marita Funke and Mariette Thérèse Bernier spoke at Immaculate Conception Seminary Formation Days. In October Sister Marita presented Lectio Divina; in December Sister Marlene reflected on "Challenges in the Life of Prayer" and Sister Marita's topic was Pope Francis' encyclical on Laudato Si; in February Sister Mariette Thérèse led a discussion on the topic of Obedience.
- On November 20, Sister Marlene Milasus spoke to the class about Eucharist.
- On January 8, 2017, Sister Mariette Thérèse Bernier spoke to the young adult group from St. Thomas Parish in Bloomfield. Her topic was "What Can I Do As a Young Adult Catholic?"
- Sister Mary Feehan participated in the Benedictine Priories meeting and retreat in Tucson, Arizona, January 31-February 5.

Events at the Monastery 2017

Women's Retreats
- April 13-16  Holy Week Retreat
- May 26-28  Private Retreat for Individuals
- July 7-14  Monastic Live-In

Triduum Services
- Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper, 7 PM
- Good Friday service, 3:00PM
- Easter Vigil, 8 PM
- Easter Morning Praise, 10:30 AM
- Easter Morning Mass, 11:00 AM

Vocation Discernment Retreats:  April 28-30, August 18-20

For more information go to www.catholicforum.com/bensisnj or call 908-353-3028