

# Christmas Greetings



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## From the Prioress

*Dear Friends,*

As we draw close to this holy season of Christmas, we send you our warmest prayers and wishes for every blessing and grace in the days and the year ahead. We are grateful for your love and support and we assure you of your place in our hearts and prayers.

As we journey together into the New Year of 2026, we ask that the Heart of God fill each of you with every blessing and the warmth of God's love and care. Blessed Christmas!

With our love and prayer,  
Mother Victoria and all your Santa Rita Sisters

## Meet Our Newest Member

God's mysterious providence brought us an unexpected Christmas gift in December 2024: Sr. Bonitas from our mother house, Mt. St. Mary's Abbey. God captivated her heart with the unique beauty surrounding our monastery and the spirit of the desert that pervades this place.

We recognize God's hand in bringing her here and are grateful for her generous spirit. Sr. Bonitas now serves as our vocation director, works in the altar bread department, and manages our new website.





# A Sacred Invitation:

## Monastic Experience Weekends Welcome Seekers

This year, we hosted two Monastic Experience Weekends—one in April and one in October. Each weekend welcomed three devoted women from the Tucson and Phoenix areas, bringing a total of six guests to our Abbey. Every sister in our community participated in some way, and our visitors expressed heartfelt gratitude for both the program and the spirit in which it was offered.

We entrust these women to God's loving guidance, praying that grace and light will lead them to the home their hearts seek.



*"I wanted to express my gratitude for the Monastic Experience Weekend at Santa Rita Abbey. It was a deeply enriching and enlightening experience, immersing myself in prayer, reflection, and the rhythm of monastic life. I am truly thankful for the warm hospitality and support from the community. Please extend my thanks to everyone involved. I cherish the memories from this retreat as I continue to discern my path. Many blessings!" – Josephine*

## Save the Dates!

Are you (or is a woman you know) considering the contemplative life?

Mark your calendar and share the dates for the **2026 Monastic Experience Weekends:**

- April 10-12
- October 2-4

Open to single Catholic women ages 21-40. There is no fee to attend. Lodging and meals are provided.

Full details available on our website:

**[www.santaritaabbey.org/monastic-experience-weekend](http://www.santaritaabbey.org/monastic-experience-weekend)**

## Lauren's Observership: A Step in Her Discernment Journey

From June 24 to July 29, Lauren Thompson completed her observership—an important final stage of discernment before entering monastic life. This period allowed her to live within the community for 4 to 6 weeks, experiencing the rhythm and spirit of our vocation firsthand. May God continue to lead her toward her destiny in Him.



## A Loving Transition



Our two eldest Sisters, Clare (98) and Miriam (92), have moved to Handmaker, a nursing home in Tucson. While we miss their presence in the monastery, we are comforted knowing they are receiving the attentive care they need — more than we could provide here. We visit them as often as we can.

May God continue to bless them in this new chapter of their monastic journey.

## Welcome Home, Sr. Hildegard

After a year in her native Kenya due to U.S. immigration policy, our beloved Sr. Hildegard is safely home at Santa Rita Abbey. While abroad, she studied Information Technology and now brings her skills to support our Altar Bread Shipping System.

We rejoice in her return and give thanks for God's providential care.





## Farewell to a Faithful Shepherd



Since 2017, Bishop Edward Weisenburger has faithfully served as bishop of our Tucson Diocese. This year, Pope Francis appointed him the sixth archbishop of Detroit. Bishop Weisenburger has been a devoted shepherd to our diocese and a cherished friend to our community at Santa Rita Abbey.

Before his departure, the archbishop-elect joined us for Mass and a meal—our final community photo with him marks a moment of deep gratitude and affection. We, along with many throughout the diocese, miss him dearly and hold him in our prayers as he embraces his new responsibilities.

## General Chapter in Assisi A Sign of Hope

In September, M. Vicki joined superiors, delegates, and service members of our Order in Assisi for the General Chapter, held under the theme: *“Cistercian charism in today’s world under the sign of hope.”*

In his opening conference our Abbot General Bernardus Peeters highlighted the importance of bringing our Cistercian charism into focus through increased collaboration - communities and regions working together towards the future in a spirit of hope. The three weeks of the chapter were a grace-filled experience for all participants of our deepening unity in the bond of charity. May the spirit of this chapter bear good fruit in the years to come.



## Water Heater & HVAC System

All we want for Christmas are new water heaters and HVAC systems for the sisters' dormitory.

In August of 1988 we moved into a brand new dormitory. A large array of solar panels graced the roof to provide hot water for sinks and showers all year round, as well as for room heat in the winter. Over thirty-seven years later, we are still using all the original equipment, and the system is beginning to break down.

The various components are too antiquated to be simply swapped out. It is imperative that we redesign and replace the entire system with today's energy-efficient technology. We are in the process of obtaining bids for this project and do not yet have an exact figure to publish here, but we expect to spend upwards of \$60,000 for two water heaters and two new HVAC systems. Please would you prayerfully consider making a financial contribution towards this project?

We would be so grateful for your help!

## Annual Retreat Treasures of the Cistercian Heart

From August 17 to 23, we were blessed with our annual retreat, led by Sr. Mary-Ellen from our Motherhouse, Mount St. Mary's Abbey. With grace and serenity, she guided us into the deep, tranquil spirit of Cistercian life.

Her tender invitation set the tone: “Along the short journey of this retreat, we are going to encounter seven Treasures which all Cistercians hold dear and try to embrace in our daily life. These treasures are moments of personal encounters with Jesus in one form or another, which may help refresh your energy and enthusiasm to continue on with integrity and love, along your journey to eternal life.”



# With Grateful Hearts:

**Our Dedicated Workers and Generous Volunteers**

**Lupita, Karina & John, Colleen & Dennis, Marcia & Clay, Yana, Eleanore & Maria**

*Thank you for your faithful service and loving support.*

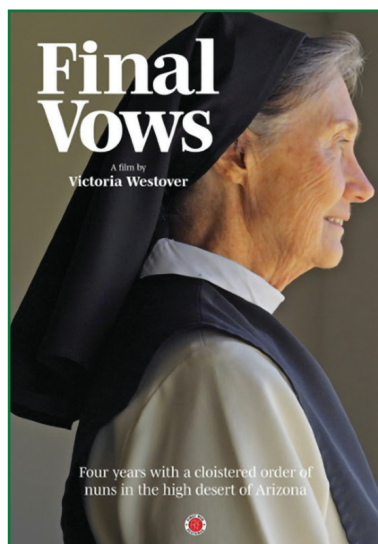
*Your presence and help are a true blessing to our community.*

*May God reward you with abundant grace and joy!*



## Beauty that leads to God

Beauty draws the human heart to God, who is Beauty itself. This past spring, we planted Verbena flower beds around our dormitory, brightening our backyard with vibrant color from April to October. We also refreshed the interior of the dormitory with a fresh coat of paint—simple acts to glorify God in His Beauty.



## Final Vows

### Our Documentary Film

We're delighted to share good news: *Final Vows*, the documentary film about our life at Santa Rita Abbey, is now available to stream or purchase on DVD.

Set in our Cistercian monastery in the high desert of Arizona, the film offers an intimate glimpse into our daily rhythm of prayer and work. Each sister's journey is unique, yet all of us share a common call—to remain in the community we entered for life. With honesty and grace, we share our joys and struggles, inviting viewers into the quiet beauty of monastic life.

Woven from small moments, *Final Vows* serves as a meditation and gently asks: might this way of life hold wisdom for our world today?

**Watch the film today:** Vimeo | Amazon | DVD available for purchase