

# Christmas Greetings



ISSUE NO. XXVI • CHRISTMAS • 2020



## From the Prioress

*Dear Friends,*

Who would have imagined that our world would have changed so dramatically in one year? The coronavirus and resulting pandemic have altered our lives in ways we never thought possible. May we all watch over one another in helping to curb its spread and to care for each other. We join our hearts and prayers to yours and ask that this holy season bring us all closer to a vaccine and a new normal. In our prayer we hold you before the Face of God with much love, not only this Christmas, but all through the coming year. We offer you our chronicle of 2020 and thank you for your friendship and support. May these holy days bring you every blessing and good.

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

## Our Newest Sisters

Last year we introduced our newest members, Sr. Hildegard and Postulant Sharon. This year we are happy to say that both are setting down their roots in our desert soil. Sr. Hildegard's radiant smile, gentle ways, and quiet generosity have endeared her to the whole community. Postulant Sharon, who became a novice, Sister Sharon, on March 25, has filled our hallways with her laughter, humbled us with her eagerness to learn, and amazed us with her seemingly endless energy. We thank God for guiding each of these beautiful, faith-filled, and dedicated women to our monastery. Please pray for them as they continue their journey with us.



Sr. Sharon and Novice Director Sr. Rita

continued on page 2





*Sr. Clare after making final vows in 1955*

## Sr. Clare's 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

On September 8 the Church celebrates the birth of Mary, Mother of God and our Mother. It is a particularly special day for our Sister Clare, as this was the day in 1950 on which she received the Cistercian habit and began her novitiate as a lay sister. Yes, that was 70 years ago! Sr. Clare comments, with a glowing smile on her face, "It's been great!"



*Sr. Clare on Easter Sunday in 2020*

## Taking Christmas Orders Now for New and Existing Customers

To order altar breads for your parish, contact Sr. Rita at [cistercianab@gmail.com](mailto:cistercianab@gmail.com) or place an online order on our website at <https://www.santaritaabbey.org/altar-breads/>

## Our Newest Sisters Cont.

From Mother Vicki's chapter talk on Sr. Sharon's Clothing Day:

"I will lead her into the desert and there I will speak to her heart. [cf. Hosea 2:16-22] Here we are, dear Sharon, one year into your Cistercian life in the magnificent high desert of the Southwest and in this place of Santa Rita Abbey. God has led you here, and you have heard his voice and responded with love. He has been leading you through deserts of a different sort to this community.

A place to seek God and a place for God to seek out your heart with his love and mercy. A place to speak tenderly to you, through your sisters, through the daily round of Cistercian life, and through all that the desert is...

We welcome you with much love and joy as you take this next step in your Cistercian journey along with your sisters into the heart of God."

See more photos of Sr. Sharon's clothing and other monastery events on our website's journal page at <https://www.santaritaabbey.org/journal/>

## The Pandemic and Its Impact



Early in 2020 our monastic prayer took on greater urgency and sharper focus as the COVID-19 virus spread across borders and oceans, and the number of infections and deaths rose exponentially.

Here at Santa Rita our retreat house and our chapel were closed to the public in mid-March. Since we did not have a resident chaplain at that time, we went five months without Mass. The social restrictions required during the pandemic led to the closing of churches and thereby to a dramatic reduction in sales and income for our bakery, Cistercian Altar Breads.

Baking and selling whole wheat altar breads to parishes across the country is our main source of income, but this year our production crew of eight sisters and two hired employees was virtually unemployed for several months.

This fall our parish customers began ordering our breads again—although in reduced amounts—and we are happily back at work two or three days a week. We recognize that many others in the world are in far greater need than we are. As the pandemic continues, let us all pray for one another!



# Our New Kitchen

## Our kitchen renovation project is complete

Before the contractor's crew arrived, some wonderful volunteers helped us move out. Tina Letarte and Bernie Reindl at the Sonoita Mini Mart showered us with free boxes, and Lupita Eldridge helped us fill them. Faculty and students of Salpointe Catholic High School moved more in one afternoon than we could have done in a month! Dennis Cozzetti and crew wrestled our 1,200 pound bread dough mixer out the door and onto their truck. Thank you!

Demolition began on March 9. Just three months later, the remodeled kitchen passed its final inspection, and we moved back in. We love our new spacious, accessible, and beautiful kitchen! We extend our gratitude to the generous benefactor who took our maybe-someday-dream and gave us the means to realize it. Our thanks go as well to architect Hank Krzysik and contractor Dave Mellgren, who paired up again for this project, and to supervisor Michael Mellgren who made it all happen. God bless you, one and all!



Photo Above: The cramped kitchen before renovation



Photo Above: Salpointe student volunteers; Photo Below: Renovation in process



Photo Below: Our spacious kitchen after renovation





# The Benedictine Monastery of Erlac



*Brothers Lawrence, Pachomius (Kurt) and Dominique*

Our dear friend and monastic neighbor, Brother Pachomius (Kurt) Pirmanschegg, abbot of the Benedictine Monastery of Erlac, passed away on March 11. Born in Slovenia in 1933, the young Kurt entered the Cistercian monastery of Heiligenkreuz in Austria at the age of 15.

Years later, while studying in France, Br. Pachomius met a Benedictine monk, Br. James Straif. The two monks shared the same vision: a monastery of brothers (not priests) living a simple life of prayer. They returned to Austria where they eventually established Erlach Monastery in Niederwaldkirchen. Over time, they were joined by like-minded men. Br. James, lovingly called "Father," was their first abbot.

Seeking more solitude, the community moved to southern Arizona in 1980.

They had found the perfect location at the end of Franklin Lane (soon to be renamed Benedict's Lane) in Casa Blanca Canyon south of the Santa Rita Mountains—just fifteen miles from our monastery of Santa Rita. There these humble monks settled down to a quiet, hidden life of faithful prayer.

When their beloved Father James died in 2005, Br. Pachomius became the new abbot. When Br. Pachomius died in March this year, the surviving community members, Br. Lawrence (Oluf) Koester, and oblate Br. Dominique Bodevin, recognized that they were unable to keep the monastery going without him.

The monastery closed in May. Br. Lawrence is now being lovingly cared for at a facility in Tucson, while Br. Dominique has returned to his own home in NYC.

Br. Pachomius was dearly loved by his monastic brothers, by our own community of Santa Rita Abbey, and by the monks' many friends. Their local friends, especially, miss him and the other monks. Because of COVID-19 we have not yet been able to celebrate a Mass of Christian Burial for our beloved Br. Pachomius. We hope to be able to do so sometime in 2021.

## A Cistercian Visitor

Fr. Mark Scott, former abbot of New Melleray Abbey in Iowa and now on sabbatical, was with us for three months this fall.

After his two weeks of self-isolation came to an end, what a joy it was to have daily Mass in our chapel once again! Fr. Mark also directed our annual community retreat the week of October 11-17. Fr. Mark left us in early November, but we hope to see him again in 2021.



*Fr. Mark offering Mass in our chapel*