

Christmas Greetings



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From the Prioress

Dear Friends,

Looking back over 2019, we rejoice at all of God's gifts in our lives — especially your friendship, love and support — and the many ways that God has made this a year of growth and grace for us. We pray that you will be deeply blessed in this season of celebrating God's love made visible in the birth of Jesus. We hold you in our hearts and ask that the tender love of God enfold you and all your loved ones in the coming days of this joyful season and in the new year.

Please enjoy our newly-designed newsletter, our annual chronicle of God's footprints in our lives during the past year — footprints in which each of you share a special place of love. Blessed Christmas!

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

Meet Our Newest Members

In March, we received with joy two new women into our community — Sister Hildegard and Postulant Sharon. Sr. Hildegard is a native of Kenya who entered our Order in France in 2002. Postulant Sharon is a native of Texas and worked in the physical therapy profession before entering our community. Please support Sr. Hildegard and Postulant Sharon by your prayers as they continue their monastic journey with us.



Two Cistercian Visitors

In September, our community welcomed Dom Elias Dietz, Abbot of Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, to lead us in our annual week of classes focused on a particular aspect of Cistercian history and spirituality. This year, Dom Elias guided us in an examination of a selection of sermons by the Cistercian Father Isaac of Stella.



Dom Elias Dietz

Our annual community retreat is always a highlight of the year and this year was no exception. Dom Erik Varden of Mount St. Bernard Abbey in England was our retreat master. We thank him for his wonderful daily conferences and congratulate him on his recent appointment as Bishop of Trondheim prelatute in Norway!



Dom Erik Varden



God Still Calling: Monastic Experience Weekends Bring Women to the Abbey Seeking to Answer God's Call for Their Lives

From August 16-19, we hosted several enthusiastic, faith-filled women for a deeper look into the contemplative monastic life as lived in our Trappist Cistercian tradition.

A blessing not only for the women who attend but also for all of us here at the abbey, these weekends are a time both for silence and sharing — an opportunity to listen deeply to God's voice and to experience his love lived out in community.

Save the Dates!

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

Mark your calendar and share the dates for the **2020 Monastic Experience Weekends:**

- March 6-9
- August 21-24

Open to Catholic women ages 21-40, there is no cost to attend and meals are provided.

Full details available on our website:

www.santaritaabbey.org/monastic-experience-weekend

Kitchen Renovation Project: Design Complete & Ready for Build-Out

After the chapel, it's safe to say that, for many of us, our favorite place in the monastery is the kitchen! Originally constructed in the 1980s as the altar bread bakery, the space was retrofitted to serve as the community kitchen when the business outgrew the space and moved into its own dedicated building across the driveway. Four decades later, the kitchen no longer meets the accessibility needs of our sisters or current standards of energy efficiency. Thanks to a generous donor, we have been able to move forward with this project.

This year, as a first step, we worked with the contractor and architect who built our family guest house (Dave Mellgren and Hank Kzysik) to complete the design phase of the project. We are now ready to begin the renovation phase after the new year. Among other changes, this work will replace the current narrow aisles with wider, more easily accessible ones and all the windows in the kitchen and refectory with new, energy-efficient ones. Be sure to check our website for updates and photos as the work progresses!



Sisters Miriam and Esther talking with Mother Vicki in the current kitchen — it's a tight squeeze!

Cistercian Altar Breads — A 40-Year Tradition



As part of our Cistercian vocation and following the Rule of St. Benedict, our abbey (and all Trappist houses) are self-supporting with an industry that not only sustains the community financially, but provides us with our common daily work, in balance with our communal and private prayer. At Santa Rita Abbey, our primary industry since 1978 has been baking whole wheat altar breads. We view this part of our life as not only practical, but also as our ministry of prayer and assistance to the poor. It is a blessing and a privilege to provide our customers with the altar breads for their liturgies.

Taking Christmas Orders Now for New and Existing Customers

Need some extras for the Advent/Christmas season?

Or maybe it's been a while since your last order?

Whatever your needs are, we're grateful for your business and are always available to help with your orders.

Referrals and recommendations are our best source of new customers, so why not tell someone you know — a friend, colleague, priest or parish administrator — about us. Thank you!

Please contact Sr. Rita now at cistercianab@gmail.com or place an online order on our website at <https://www.santaritaabbey.org/altar-breads/>



Grasshopper Gift Fund Help us Keep Our Abbey Grounds Beautiful (and “Fire Wise”)

Nestled at the base of the Santa Rita foothills, our abbey property is comprised of beautiful, high-desert land. Serene and protected, these lands are a vital part of our monastery home...and require constant, expert care and maintenance!

Our two, wonderful lay employee grounds-keepers (see page 4) had been using two types grass-cutting machines to do the job: a tractor with a bush-hog, and a smaller riding mower. After repeated break-downs and repairs of the smaller mower which was designed for small-scale, residential use, Mother Vicki made the determination to purchase an industrial-grade “Grasshopper” brand mower, better suited for our rocky, rugged terrain. As you can see from the above photo, she was eager to be the first to take it for a test drive!

We are pleased to report that, with the new mower, Felip and Zach are now much better equipped to manage and maintain our extensive, desert property.

Please consider making a gift in any amount to help us cover the unplanned expense (\$8,000) of the new “Grasshopper” mower.

While we can't promise you a test drive, we can assure you that, on your next visit, you'll find the grounds “camera ready” for your photo ops and selfies!

Retreat House: With Major Repairs Completed, It's Ready for You (or Your Small Group)

Why not make a retreat at the abbey your New Year's Resolution? Whether it's your first visit to our retreat house or part of an annual tradition, we'd love to welcome you!



The exterior stucco, roof and some of the framing of our beautiful, 25-year-old retreat house were all in need of repair. This October, we closed the seven-room building for several weeks so that Chamberlain Lath & Stucco could tackle these tasks...and they did a beautiful job. Why not come out for a visit and take a look? Or, better yet, contact Sr. Margarita at sraretreats@gmail.com and make a reservation.

Lay Staff Spotlight Our Co-Workers in Ministry

Our lay employees are important members of our “monastery family” and we are grateful for the valuable assistance they provide to our life and work. In the altar bread bakery, three lovely women — Leslie, Lupita and Bernie — work alongside our sisters five days a week to produce and ship our delicious, whole wheat altar breads.



We also have two wonderful men employees, Felip and Zach, who keep our extensive property grounds looking beautiful all year round. We thank all our employees for their work with us and ask you to keep them and their families in your prayers.

