Benedictines: *Lovers of Learning*

*Katherine Kraft, OSB*

A Benedictine monastery without a library is unthinkable.

Manuscripts, books and libraries have been an integral and vital part of Benedictine life from its beginning in the sixth century to the present. Benedict called the monastery a "school" in which a minimum of two to three hours daily were spent in reading and study with extended reading time on Sundays. We are familiar with images of Benedictine monastics copying manuscripts, engaged in research, study and teaching.

Emerging from this long monastic tradition of the love of learning, Saint Benedict’s Monastery library has evolved into a collection of 13,000 volumes plus electronic media, journals, magazines and newspapers. For 30 years, the monastery library was excellently managed and developed under the direction of Sister Paula Reiten, librarian. She increased library holdings, moved the former library to its present, more spacious location and added computers and other electronic media.

While the library collection focuses on resources devoted to monasticism, Benedictina, scripture, theology, liturgy, church history, spirituality and Catholicism, it includes fiction, biography, memoir, poetry, history, psychology, the fine arts and other literary genres. Networked computers provide access to the Internet and to the extensive resources of the libraries at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University. A significant number of books from Saint Bede Monastery, Eau Claire, Wis., were added to the collection in 2011 following the merging of our two communities. Regularly, college faculty/staff and friends of the sisters donate books, mostly fiction and biographies—these contributions are greatly appreciated.

Today, Sister Denise Braegelman is the cataloger for both the monastery library and Saint Scholastica Convent library. More than 1,000 books have been added to that collection located in the Ramsey-Kaproth Wellness Center. Maryjude Hoeffel regularly volunteers as a library aide. Both libraries operate on an honor system and are open 24 hours every day of the year. The sisters are avid readers, and frequently recommend authors, books and media for the library. St. Hugh, a 12th century Carthusian monk, said it well when he wrote:

“When we are at peace, books are our treasure and delight; When we are hungry, they are our food; When we are sick, they are our remedy. Books are a resource which no one can afford to neglect.”

*ABOVE and LEFT: Monastery Library Director, Sister Katherine Kraft, right, and cataloger, Sister Denise Braegelman*