



Mount Saint Benedict Monastery

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Change of Leadership for Benedictine Sisters of Erie

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Sister Lynn McKenzie, President of the Monastic Congregation of St. Scholastica, was in Erie on July 11 to install Sister Diane Rabe as administrator of the Benedictine Sisters of Erie. The Erie community is a member of the Congregation.

The Benedictine Sisters had convened this past Memorial Day weekend to elect a new prioress to succeed Sister Stephanie Schmidt, who completed her five-year term of office on July 11. As the canonically elected leader of the Congregation, Sister Lynn was present for the discernment weekend and made the decision to pause the process prior to an actual election. "Given the complexities of the sisters' deliberations, I made the decision to pause the discernment and election process so that the sisters could continue to formulate plans before choosing someone from among their membership to lead their community as prioress," she said. While not unprecedented, Sister Lynn's decision is unusual in monasteries like Erie's that have a solid membership and multiple sisters with the gifts and qualifications necessary to serve as prioress.

Sister Diane was appointed administrator of Erie's Benedictine community for a term of one year. She will provide guidance and oversight on matters concerning monastic life, the operation of the monastery, and Benedictine ministries. "We are heading into the land of the unknown but we, as a community, have been there before and came out the other side stronger than ever," said Sister Diane. "I expect the same to be the case in this new chapter of our shared life."

The sixth century Rule of St. Benedict is a guide for living well with God, self, and others. The sisters of the Erie monastery have been following the Rule since they arrived in Erie in 1856 to teach the children of German immigrants. As Church and culture changed, so did the monastic community. They responded to the ever-emerging needs of Erie and the world and today continue their good work through Emmaus Ministries, the Inner-City Neighborhood Art House, St. Benedict Child Development Center, St. Benedict Education Center, Benetwood Apartments, Benetvision, and Monasteries of the Heart. Additionally, they are a spiritual center in Erie with the monastery at the heart of their prayer and communal life and the place where they welcome guests and spiritual seekers in many and various ways.

The Benedictine community is a voice of peace and justice in Erie and beyond. Their current Corporate Commitment is: *The Benedictine Sisters of Erie and Oblates commit to being a healing presence and a prophetic witness for peace and justice and to climate conscious living. We will decrease harmful patterns of consumerism and work with others to create systemic change needed to meaningfully address the climate crisis.*

In her role as administrator, Sister Diane will guide the sisters through a year-long time of prayer, discernment, and discussion, all the while making sure that the good works and prophetic voice of the community remain strong.

The Rule of Benedict begins with the instruction to “listen with the ear of your heart.” This year will be a time of intense listening for the sisters—listening for the voice of God, to their own hearts, to the wisdom of their sisters and their tradition, and to the emerging needs in the wider world. When what is murky now becomes clear, Sister Lynn will convene the community for a canonical election of prioress. “We truly believe that this time to slow down and process more deeply is something we can model for others. Our world pushes for immediate results in so many ways and often what is needed to achieve true growth and transformation is a slower pace and deeper thinking,” said Sister Diane.

Sister Diane was raised in Erie and is a 1969 graduate of St. Benedict Academy. Three years after graduation, and while finishing her degree at Villa Maria College, she entered the Benedictine Sisters where she was a teacher and principal before becoming the administrator of St. Benedict Child Development Center in 1991. For nearly thirty years she directed the award-winning center, growing the programs, training staff, and giving children and their families opportunities they would not have had otherwise. She left the Center in 2020 when she became subprioress of the Benedictine community. Sister Diane has also held other roles in the monastic community including Monastery Coordinator and Vocation and Scholastic Director. She continues to serve on the board of the East Coast Migrant Head Start Project.

Sister Lynn also appointed a temporary monastic council to serve for one year, to advise and support Sister Diane. These sisters are Charlotte Anne Zalot, Christine Kosin, Dianne Sabol, Katherine Horan, and Linda Romey.

The Benedictine sisters appreciate and count on the ongoing prayerful support of the Erie community.