



BENEDICTINE TOUCHSTONE

Fall 2006



Benedictine Nuns • St. Emma Monastery • Greensburg, PA 15601

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Mother Leonarda's Legacy: 1943-1965

Properties Bought and Buildings Erected



Developmental views:

Top: House (1943)
Above: Farm (1944)



Above: View from east (1966)
Left: Aerial view of St. Emma (1959)

See related article on page 3.

Prioress' Reflection

By Mother Mary Anne Noll OSB



On June 29, the universal church celebrated the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul who literally gave

up their lives for their belief in Jesus as the God-Man.

Before the liturgical reforms of Vatican II, July 1, would have been the feast of the Precious Blood. On July 1, 1950 Bishop Deardon of the Diocese of Pittsburgh (our diocese at the time) dedicated the Fatima Chapel for the retreatants.

These two feasts express the important aspects of a monastery and of our particular community.

We celebrate publicly the 75th anniversary of the arrival of Mother Leonarda and nine Sisters at St. Vincent Archabbey and College, Latrobe, PA on the feast of St. Walburga, February 25, 1931; by 1939, 40 Sisters had come from the Abtei of St. Walburg, Eichstaett, Germany to St. Vincent.

Peter and Paul are the great apostles, whose experience of Jesus to-

tally changed their lives. This coming to know Jesus personally changed Peter from fisherman, to campaign adviser to Jesus, to disciple, to fearless preacher, and, finally to martyrdom.

Monasticism exists in the heart of the church, a visible expression of people trying to let the Gospel "be their guide." Benedict also asks that we strive "to prefer nothing to the love of Christ, to share by patience in the sufferings of Christ, and to treat our daily tools as sacred vessels of the altar. Many lay people find in the Rule of Benedict insights on applying the Gospel to their daily lives.

Who were our foundresses? For the first thirty years of her monastic life, Mother Leonarda taught in the elementary school attached to the Abbey. According to the times and the education structure in Germany, nearly all of the other Sisters finished school at age 15 – lengthened perhaps by a course in something akin to our home economics.

And what did they do that made them so special, such role models to me, to the other Sisters who have entered and to you? They tried to love God in their daily lives of prayer and

work, the *ora et labora*.

They prayed together first thing in the morning, they prayed during their work, they prayed together during their "break" from the kitchen and dining rooms in the afternoon, and they prayed together in the evening having served supper and prepared for breakfast. And the next day they prayed and they worked and they prayed

and they worked and prayed and the following day they did the same — for 56 years at St. Vincent. Yesterday and today, we follow this same tradition of prayer and work that our foundresses have so beautifully handed on to us.

We try to respond to God's hospitality of inviting us through baptism to share His intimate love between Father, Son and Spirit, by offering God hospitality in our lives through time and a gracious welcome through our monastic life.

We offer hospitality to the world through prayer, named "special" intentions, and intentions known only to God. According to Benedict, we try to welcome guests as Christ as Benedict said: retreatants, people to our gift store, those who are not sure why they stopped by, and those who call or email.

We owe a special debt of prayerful gratitude to Mother Leonarda, Mother Emmanuel, Mother Agnes, the forty Sisters buried here and the five Sisters buried at St. Vincent. These Sisters by their faith, dedication, perseverance, and *ora et labora* are our role models and the Sisters who helped make St. Emma's St. Emma.

We thank all of you, our retreatants, our relatives, our friends, those special people who give of themselves so generously in time and loving labor known as our volunteers, and all of you who support our lives by your prayer and your various kinds of support.

July 1, 2006 was a celebration of God's faithfulness to His promises to our Sisters, those earthen vessels that held the treasure of Christ's life ahead of us and to us, the present earthen vessels who hold Christ's life now.

We thank you for joining us in giving gratitude to God, for our past, our present and our future.

May God bless you.

Mother Mary Anne Noll, OSB

(Adapted from Prioress' talk at the July 1, 2006 celebration)

Prayer Requests & Intentions

Please use the enclosed envelope to send us your prayer requests and intentions.



A History of St. Emma – Part III

*The third of a series of installments
of our 75-year history in the United States*

After Germany was at war, it was no longer possible for our Sisters to send money to the Motherhouse, Abtei Sankt Walburg. Mother Leonarda OSB received a letter through Canada from the Abtei saying “to look out for yourselves” and Mother Leonarda interpreted that to mean “buy your own property.” The Sisters looked at various properties in the Latrobe and Greensburg area that would be a suitable place where the Sisters from St. Vincent could go in the summer and when they would retire from St. Vincent. This was all the Sisters had in mind, but God had much more. Divine Providence led them to this house and ten acres that belonged to the John Robertshaw, Sr. family, Greensburg, PA; no other property that they considered had the potential for development that this property did.

On Easter Wednesday 1943 Mother Leonarda signed the document to transfer this property. Since all the Sisters lived and worked at St. Vincent, Mother Leonarda asked Mr. and Mrs. Herman Vallozzi, Sr., to continue living here. Mr. Vallozzi had previously worked for the Robertshaw family.

That very first summer, the Knights of Columbus from Greensburg and the young Sodality women from St. Bruno Church, Greensburg asked for a day of recollection here. Since that time more than 175,000 have come to St. Emma to seek God in a deeper relationship.

In 1944 the Sisters bought the adjacent 92 acre farm also from the Robertshaw family. The Sisters themselves never farmed it, but the purchase gives St. Emma this wonderful illusion of “being in the country” even though the city borders two sides of our property.

In 1950 Bishop John Dearden of the Diocese of Pittsburgh dedicated the Fatima Chapel that seats 120 people. Beneath it was the dining room that only had an outside entrance. For large groups, the Sisters cooked and brought the food out from St. Vincent’s.

The Diocese of Greensburg was created from the Pittsburgh Diocese in 1951. Most Rev. Hugh C. Lamb, Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia was named the first bishop. Since Dennis Cardinal Dougherty died in Philadelphia, Bishop Lamb could only come to Greensburg in 1952.

With only the See city named and everything else needing to be arranged for, Bishop Lamb came to live at St. Emma for three weeks (until he could locate a home) and stayed until his death seven years later. Msgr. Eugene Sullivan came with him, served as his secretary and master of ceremonies for several years and also lived here. St. Emma also served as the Chancery for the first year.

Mother Leonarda asked Sr. Agnes if she could arrange her vestment making so that she and another Sister



**Mother Leonarda Fritz, OSB
1880-1965**

could provide the hospitality for Bishop Lamb for his “three weeks.” Mother Agnes’ short temporary assignment lasted until her death in 1995.

With the encouragement of Bishop Lamb, Mother Leonarda built the retreat house in 1954 with 49 private rooms. In 1960 the first monastery building was completed with a small chapel, 22 cells (rooms) and a large, commercial size laundry. (For the previous five years, the Sisters took the retreat house linens from the retreat house to St. Vincent where they washed them.)

The Sisters now had room, literally, for American women to enter and the first one arrived just four months later in February 1961 and several followed that same year. With the reception of American women, the Sisters began to pray the Divine Office in English, probably the second monastery of women to do so in the United States.

In May of 1964 the second monastery building was blessed. Looking ahead when the Sisters would no longer be at St. Vincent (yet another 23 years later!), Mother Leonarda included another 30 cells, monastery kitchen, refectory (dining room) and another community room.

That fall Mother Leonarda insisted on having the cemetery laid out; she died on May 9, 1965, the first to be buried in our cemetery here. (The first five nuns to die are buried in the cemetery at St. Vincent.)

What a remarkable woman! There is good reason that the students at St. Vincent affectionately referred to her as “Mother Bearcat.” (“Bearcats” is the name of the sports teams). At age 74, Mother Leonarda had the choice of

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