

# THE BENEDICTINE BULLETIN SPRING

2016



St. Scholastica Priory, 271 North Main Street, PO Box 606, Petersham, MA 01366

## OUR FOUNDRRESS



"This is Mother Mary Clare and she is our foundress!" She would stand and smile shyly. We knew how blessed we were to have her with us. We hoped we'd have that joy for a good number more years even though she was 90 years old: one sister, Elizabeth, was on the verge of turning 100 and another, Ruth, was 98. But it was not to be. God had other plans and our beloved Mother Mary Clare died at 3:30 AM on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was as if she tried to breathe in this new year with us. Her last full day on earth was the feast of Mary the Mother of God.

Mother Mary Clare's parents, Cornelius and Mattie, instilled in their four children (her brother, Neil, died in his 60s and was a judge) the value of education. The rooms and halls of their house were filled with books. They lived in a three-story house on Broadway in Cambridge, MA, in the shadow of Harvard and Radcliffe.

That Mother Mary Clare was brilliant was apparent even when she was small. A friend visiting the family once told

everyone to be quiet and listen because Muriel was speaking. Mother Mary Clare attended Girl's Latin Academy. Wounded WWII soldiers were coming back into hospitals at that period. Although dreading it, she became very devoted to volunteering to help them during that time. In 1942 she went on to Radcliffe College. In her book, *Keeping the Faith at Harvard*, the chapter she wrote on herself is mostly about her professors and their lives, their effects on her intellectual wealth, and a terrible alienation passed on by others that ate at her soul.

Her family was Episcopalian and she attended Sunday services with her mother and siblings. Her father supported this, but only attended at Christmas or Easter with them. Whatever belief she had was torn to shreds during her years at Radcliffe College and she felt a dreadful emptiness. In 1945, an assignment led her to interview a living poet, Fr. Leonard Feeney. This is how God brought her to the Catholic faith and exposed her to a



spirit of life, hope and love that won her over so completely that her life changed forever.

While working on her master's at Harvard and teaching at East Boston High School, she became a Catholic. In 1948 she became a novice in a Carmelite monastery. She soon left and devoted herself in private vows to a community started in Cambridge. She spent years using her many gifts of music, teaching and baking. Finally in the early 1970's Mother Mary Clare found herself the superior of a number of women. The advice of many abbots, bishops and other knowledgeable persons guided her and the community to take the first steps of becoming part of the Benedictine family. She wrote a letter to Mother Elizabeth Sumner, OSB, Abbess of Stanbrook Abbey, which put into motion the canonical requirements of incorporating the existing way of life into a monastic family whose roots had been present from



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the earliest days of the student center she encountered at Bow and Arrow Street, in Cambridge.

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1984 Mother Mary Clare made her own profession of solemn vows along with a number of other members of the community. It was also the day she was canonically elected as the first Benedictine prioress of St. Scholastica Priory. This was no surprise to the community, but it still was a day of great joy and confirmation for all of us as we became an independent priory. Soon after this glorious day Mother Mary Clare led the community to consider a new location, and after a long discernment we moved to Petersham on May 25, 1985.

She rejoiced when Fr. Cyril Karam and Br. Stanislaus Ribera-Faig received permission to found a community of men in Petersham in 1985. Mother Mary Clare worked with Fr. Cyril, and later Fr. Anselm Atkinson, to build up and develop the twin monasteries by



sharing the liturgy, hospitality and a common vision of contemplative life.

Mother Mary Clare didn't set out to form a new community, make a foundation, become a superior. These things came upon her and she took them as from the



hand of the Lord. She never did anything in a little way. She always plunged deeply, took pains to research, prepare and bring the best she could – whether it was a conference, a cake or a canonical step. From her earliest life the call to excellence prodded her on, not as a scold, but as what is expected of anyone.

Mother Mary Clare was a teacher of the spiritual life in word and example. Her conferences were full of the Fathers and



Doctors of the Church, literature, contemporary disciplines, history and stories to inspire us from saints and all of manner of people. As she read she took notes in spiral notebooks and then used scissors and tape as she interlaced her theme with these quotes. She could not be dull!

She started St. Bede's Publications, which produced many excellent books and the well-known periodical, *Word & Spirit*.



She authored three books over the years: *St. Sharbel*, *Pray as You Can*, and *Keeping the Faith at Harvard*, as well as numerous published articles. She gave retreats in monasteries in the States and in the UK. She had a wide range of friends: scholars, the Catholic Workers, women who helped in the kitchen, children she met. She was often in our guest parlor speaking heart-to-heart with many who sought her counsel and friendship. Her welcome insured that they would be back just to hear that joy again!

Just prior to her retiring as prioress in 2003, Mother Mary Clare was appointed as Prioress Administratrix of Our Lady Queen Monastery in Tickfaw, Louisiana. Since the 1990s Mother Mary Clare aided this community as a daughter house and helped them to join the Subiaco Congregation. She had always had good

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health, but that suddenly changed and she began to live as "just another sister" in the community. Her ability to make that change with such grace gave her successors confidence to do what they needed to as prioress with her full support.

For twelve full years Mother Mary Clare lived as a simple member of the community after serving as superior for over 30 years. Her former position was never a barrier to anyone. She continued to teach, play the organ, serve in the kitchen and correspond with friends and benefactors right up until last September. Her walker had a tray on which she would pile every manner of thing as she created feasts on the most ordinary days. She had us rapt in attention with a story at recreation or rocking with laughter. She'd banter with sisters with that wry smile. And she prayed for every one of us, our families, friends, benefactors, the world and YOU. We miss her. MME



**Monastic Weekend**  
for Vocation Discernment:  
June 17-19 & October 7-9  
See our website for details.

Would you consider remembering us in your will or charitable remainder trust?

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St. Scholastica Priory, Inc.  
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## REMEMBRANCES

After all her years as prioress attending superiors' meetings in distant lands she was glad to stay at home and help wherever needed. Life had become much more simple. Doctor's appointments were still a requirement for her and being infirmarian for the community I would at times have the honor of taking her to her appointments. Invariably, she would say an hour before lunch, "I'm starving, aren't you? Do you think we should get some lunch?" I'd have a bemused smile on my face and say, "Yes, I think we should." We'd go to a little restaurant chain enjoying our meal while we talked and laughed. After lunch she'd ask if we could go across the road to CVS to get her a Hershey chocolate bar? I hope there's chocolate in heaven! As we pulled in our drive she would say, "Oh, I've had such a beautiful day! Thank you so much!" How I miss those times. SMA

My first summer in the community we had the great joy of staying in a house by the beach on the Cape. The house was small with many of the sisters planning to sleep on the floor; we were young and flexible then! Mother Mary Clare was given a bedroom with two twin beds for herself out of respect. But the first night she came out of her room and asked rather plaintively if someone wasn't going to share the room with her. We all rose up as one and squeezed into her space; every inch of floor and both beds were jammed with sisters. Mother Mary Clare then proceeded to keep us enthralled as only she could with stories from the lives of the saints and the early days of her religious life. thirty years have gone by, but I will never forget that night. SMO

Mother Mary Clare was our organist forever, it seems. In her last years she kept after me to get back on the organ, so I did now and then. We sat next to each other in choir. After I'd played, when I'd slip back to my place her hand would come out of her cowl sleeve and she'd make the "okay" sign, which for her meant "perfecto!" - even when I thought I'd bombed a piece. Nobody else could see it. It was so encouraging. She was like that about everything. SMF

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Random memories ...She was a woman who endured great sufferings in her life. She was a woman of deep prayer. Going back and forth from the Office, she'd often have a rosary in her hand and be saying it. She always had time to see you. She loves jazz, Bach. She was a prolific writer. Her conferences were full of quotes and insights. She was open to trying new things and new ways. If you had to leave for an early flight, she'd get up to see you off. All through her monastic life, she herself changed, and grew, and worked on faults, even in her last years and last months. She was a true monastic and nun. In her last illness, she taught us how to live and die. SG

Mother Mary Clare was a wonderful Mother. When I had just joined Our Lady Queen Monastery she started to help us in Tickfaw, LA, with no hesitation. After we moved in 2009 I enjoyed working with her when we cooked together. She taught a weekly class on Monastic Spirituality that was great. She was always happy for me when I told her I was listening to history audio books. She was so excited when I was able to go to England and Scotland last fall. At the end of her life we all were privileged to do things for her and to watch her on the last days of her journey. SC

She loved everyone unconditionally and made sure we knew it. It was beautiful to see her respond to each person as she believed they needed. Ever little thing you did for her received a "thank you, darling." She never complained even during those long days of illness. During the days of dying she would ask us how we were. SMP



**Mother Mary Clare,  
Pray for us.**

Pentecost is the moment when a  
heart of stone is shattered and a  
heart of flesh  
takes its place.

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa

A novena of Masses will be offered for  
your intentions ending on Pentecost!

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Mother Mary Clare Vincent, OSB  
July 18, 1925-January 2, 2016

When I was taking classes after moving to Petersham, there were times that I wasn't sure I understood what was taught as correct or not. I would tell her my understanding and she never made me feel ignorant but rather built up my confidence in what I knew about my faith and spiritual life and helped me grow. Mother Mary Herbert and Mother Mary Clare were my two friends that I used to talk to every day. I miss them. SM

Sr. Mary Clare was a lover of silence. In her last months, when I would ask if she wanted to move and sit in a room other than her cell, she would often respond: "If I can be silent..." Knowing this love of hers, I was particularly edified every time she greeted someone who came to visit her and wished to carry on chatty conversations. She was always happy to sacrifice her desire to be quiet with the Lord in order to find Him in the midst of community circumstances. SE

One of my favorite memories of Mother Mary Clare is of her bopping to Jazz. It was Christmastide I think, and some Jazz was playing in the refectory. It took over ten minutes for Mother Mary Clare to get back to her seat because she stopped with her eyes closed, a smile on her face, as she listened to the Jazz and bopped to it. SMI

Having Mother Mary Clare with us was having a powerhouse of prayer. Whenever something faced me as superior, an intention of my family, or a dear friend, I'd slip into her cell and ask her to pray - she didn't need to know the intention, just the person. How edified we were to see her with her walker going to church back and forth. You could see that she was struggling to do it but if she'd glance your way and see you, she'd flash a huge smile. Oh that smile that encouraged me from a postulant to prioress. MME



Some of the books that were on her bookshelf when she died: St Augustine, *On Christian Belief*; Avery Dulles, *Church and Society*; Gordon, *Bach Music in the Castle of Heaven*; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*; *The Complete Dictionary of Shakespeare Quotations*; Belloc, *Path to Rome*; Horace: *The Odes*; St. Therese, *Story of a Soul*; Chapman, *Spiritual Letters*; P. Benedict XVI & Beauty in Sacred Music; Roberts, *Centered on Christ*; *St Jerome's Homilies on the Psalms*; *The Rule of St. Benedict*; and *Roget's Thesaurus*.

