

# Community Notes

News of the Community of St. John Baptist Winter 2011-12  
Vol. XIII No. 3

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## *In this Issue:*

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Open House brings old friends and new friends together

Assemblyman Anthony Bucco Jr. and Senator Anthony Bucco with Sisters Barbara Jean, Lura Grace and Eleanor Francis, and Lily Altamura



### Page 6

Our new dog, Jennie, makes her home with us



## *Also Featured:*

*News of the Sisters, Recent Events, Calendar, and Pets!*

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## Happy New Year

Each year during December, we Sisters and residents gather with our guests around the Advent wreath before dinner. After a brief reading, we light the Advent candles. This year, one reading stood out for me. It is entitled *The Heaven Before Us* by Paula D'Arcy. Here is a portion of it.

“If you were to ask me what I really think the Christ child came to reveal, I would say, ‘Just what I’m experiencing right now. This. This recognition of spirit in life, far removed from a deity defined by the mind, or by adherence to a set of beliefs.’ Over and over, Jesus repeats that the kingdom of heaven is *here*. But it’s not an earthly kingdom. It is This. Here. Now. A way of seeing. He wanted to catapult us into a different way of relating to life and the spirit in life. He wanted to awaken something within us that would set us free. He invited us to the place where we no longer see others apart from ourselves, a place where the only thing that can possibly benefit me is what benefits the world. A place where my identity does not come from my separateness, but from the awareness that separation is an illusion.

“But we have taken the story in a different direction and made that direction that truth. We emphasize celebrations of the birth, remembrances of the journey. Christmas trees. Exchanging gifts. Vacations. We risk avoiding the message by endlessly repeating our customs until we’ve missed the shift in consciousness that would take us from and memory to the deeper truth: God is at hand. Here. And right now. The spirit within will show you. You don’t have to wait for another heaven—just see the one in front of you.”

As we enter this New Year, let us open our eyes to the presence of God in all things. God is here. Now. And that is all we need. We have all we need to live in that presence. May God’s presence fill your consciousness in the days to come. Happy New Year. -- *Sr. Barbara Jean, CSJB*

## From the Superior

On October 24-27, 2011, I was fortunate to attend the annual conference of leaders of Anglican religious orders. The conference took place at the Community of the Resurrection, which is a men’s community in Mirfield, Yorkshire, England. Of the 23 Superiors who were present, I was the only one from outside England. Although the English superiors were strangers to me at first, I soon learned that they are also learning to “think outside the box” in order to live a life that is relevant for their brothers and sisters and fits the needs of spiritual seekers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How do we make necessary changes and simultaneously preserve the core of religious life? That is the question for us on both sides of the Atlantic. Like American communities, some English orders welcome a diverse mix of people—both men and women, traditional monastic, single, and married. Some emphasize sustainable living and many are interested in interfaith work. At the same time, we joined the brothers at Mirfield each day for the Eucharist and Offices. The ease with which most participants sang the traditional plainchant was an indication to me that we still consider chant a core practice. From the photo, you can see many of the brothers and sisters wear traditional habits. It was a surprise to me to learn the mixture of traditional and non-traditional ideas shared by those in the group. In this new century, Religious Life will take many new forms, and we hope to learn from each other.

*Sr. Eleanor Francis, Superior, CSJB*



# Open House!

This fall, we opened our doors to the public and led a series of tours around our buildings and grounds. Our Associates and friends rallied around and helped with hospitality and donations of refreshments. Our guests of honor were our state Senator Anthony Bucco and state Assemblyman Anthony Bucco Jr. The Sisters led tours of the Convent and Retreat House, and our architect, Annabelle Radcliffe-Trenner led tours of our construction project. On hand also were Ray Nadaskay, architect of our barrier-free access ramp and new solarium at the Retreat House, and Bonnie Hook of Georgia Stained Glass, whose company has restored all of the leaded-pane windows in the Retreat House. Our aim has been to make the Convent more accessible to local people, so it was good to greet some of our neighbors for the first time.

Below are some scenes from the day.



**Annabelle Radcliffe-Trenner, architect for preservation plan, explains the plans for replacing the roof tiles**



**Sr. Margo leads a tour group through our front hall where manuscript illuminations are shown**



**Ray Nadaskay, architect for Retreat House barrier-free access project, chats with Alan Painter (campaign co-chair)**



**Myles Varley (campaign co-chair), Fr. Joe Hennen (founder of Daytop NJ) and Joann Painter**



**Sr. Deborah Francis speaks about the Sisters' work of spiritual direction and retreats**



# Construction Report

By Sr. Linda Clare

The final inspection of the restored windows at St Marguerite's has been completed. Our consultant, Art Femenella, and the County's historic consultant, Dominique Hawkins, have deemed the work 100% complete and of excellent quality. Our paperwork for the closeout of that project has been submitted to the County and we are now awaiting their response concerning our reimbursement.

The repair of the masonry roof underlayment continues. Smaller areas needing repair are being filled with a special mortar formulated to match the existing roof. The larger areas are being restored with a combination of stainless steel corrugated sheets, mesh and mortar. These larger areas occur mostly under the dormers where there was considerable deterioration.

The repointing of the chimneys is 100% complete except for some small areas where the old bricks will be replaced with new custom bricks being made to the existing dimensions. The masons are also restoring the exterior walls of the dormers. All of the leaded glass windows have been restored and are being held at the glass studio until the appropriate time for installation.

Last week the tunnel infill was completed. The pumping in of the Geofill was done over 2 days. One of the skylights was removed and used as the entrance point for the pumping. The skylight will be restored and replaced as requested by the New Jersey Historic Trust.



**Upper and lower dormer repair**



**Arrival of material to fill the tunnel, which has been unsafe. A new barrier-free passage is planned.**



**Removal of damaged tiles makes room for new ones. Some old tiles will be reused.**



**Groundwork is being laid for a sloping walkway over the south cloister.**

## Welcome to Michelle LaFrage

We welcome Michelle LaFrage, who has been a resident here since June, into a new relationship with the Community. A Southern Baptist from Georgia, Michelle came here on a search for a deeper relationship with God. After attendance at the Search Program, she applied for membership in the Community. Her first task was to learn about the Episcopal Church, which she finds to be “deeply spiritual.” During the fall, she prepared for confirmation with Sr. Suzanne Elizabeth. She also began attending the Church of the Messiah in Chester.

Application to our Community has many steps, and all of this takes time. Recently Michelle was confirmed here by the Rt. Rev. Prince Singh, our Bishop Visitor. With all of the steps completed, Michelle was received as a Postulant on December 15.

Entry into our Community takes a minimum of five and a half years, as one progresses from Postulant to Novice to Temporary Vows. We pray that God will bless Michelle as she begins this new path with us.



**Sr. Suzanne Elizabeth, Michelle, Bishop Singh, and Sr. Eleanor Francis after the Confirmation**



**Michelle with Sr. Barbara Jean and Sr. Eleanor Francis at her reception as a Postulant**

## Conferences and Groups

During the course of each year, many groups come to the Convent and Retreat House for prayer and study. Some recent groups of interest were: *The Strands of Life*, for spinners and those who work with yarn, organized by our resident Donna McKenzie; *Illumine My Heart*, a monthly class on the mystics, presented by Interweave and conducted by Robert Corin Morris; *Praying With Icons*, a workshop for Associates in which participants learn about Orthodox icons, conducted by Sr. Antonia Cooper OSF, and two separate workshops on the Enneagram by Sr. Laura Katharine and Carol Schindler. A calendar of conferences, retreats and events is located on the Community’s website and in each issue of *Community Notes*.



**“Illumine My Heart” class on the Mystics**



**“Praying With Icons” with Sr. Antonia, OSF**

# The Animal Kingdom

## Jennie



Hello, my name is JENNIE, and I'm the new 'Miss' here. I was rescued from NC where I was supposedly born on July 7<sup>th</sup> – that makes me (so I am told) five months old, but the vet says I am a month older according to my teeth. So much for that old saying (if someone asks your age and you don't want to let on) *I'm as old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth!!!*

I have settled in very well in my new home (having arrived on Oct.14<sup>th</sup>) and have the Sisters just where I want them! I go to Chapel and am very good during the services. I enjoy picking up sticks on my walks – the longer the better – some have been at least 5 ft. long! When I was in my foster home, before I came

to the Convent, the cat there used to play with all the puppies. But Jack here, well..... *He* is something different. I do my commando crawl for him, jump up and down, roll over, and give him my playful call, all to no avail. I am told that he is nearly 13 and just does not want to play. I suppose all cats might be different! I have heard so much talk about Christmas and what goes on then, I really am beginning to look forward to it. I hope you are too!

With love and licks, **JENNIE**

## Jack

Well folks, it wasn't long after I wrote that Jennie arrived.



There had been "dog talk" for weeks and I knew something was up when two puppies came one afternoon and the Sisters were all "checking them out." So, Jennie arrived all wiggly and waggy tailed, and the Sisters all but ignored me. I soon discovered that this pup had no manners when it came to respect for one's elders and I quickly had to teach her "her place."

Apparently she had been fostered with a young cat but did not know proper respect for someone of my age and authority. There were some who teased about how I had become the "inflatable cat" but a show of size, a low growl, and a quick bat of paw put that pup in her place quickly and it wasn't long before she knew what was expected and who was top cat. Now that she

understands who is boss we get along just fine. We even have our afternoon "coffee" together-a drop of milk for me, a biscuit for Jennie and Peace in the kingdom.

## Pony's Point of View

Well, it is really difficult to accept that winter is just around the corner. I don't know about you, Advent and Christmastide are two of my favorite seasons in the year. Late autumn is the time when the trees shed their leaves, when there is a chill in the air, and the days are gradually getting shorter. There is something so holy about the stillness of a cold winter's night, when you can almost hear soft music in the air... or is it the sound of angels' wings?

Advent lends itself to letting go, giving us the opportunity to shed whatever it is that encumbers us from the things that really matter. What *really* is important to you? What are the things in your own life that you could not be without? Ah, it may have occurred to you this might not be very characteristic of me, being only a small horse that is outside, living a simple and uncomplicated life. But, I have a lot of time to think, and ponder... Why not take a moment here and there this Holy season to



stop, look, and listen... perhaps you will also hear the sound of angels' wings! With all my love **PONY**



## *Kookie, the New Yorker*

If humans do not like change, I can tell you very honestly felines abhor them. This is not our cup of tea! Life recently has been full of changes. Sr. Deborah Francis my chief care-giver is away, and of course I don't know why. Even though my substitute is doing quite well, BUT... it's not the same. I am more often alone without human entertainment or rather getting lots of attention. A few days ago my water bowl disappeared (not that I drank out of it much), and a fountain dish replaced it. I haven't quite adjusted with this thing. I still much prefer the bathtub spigot, which for some reason is no longer working. At least, I do have the same food and beds to sleep on and my substitute lets me sleep with her. Wishing you a Blessed Christmas and joy & peace in the New Year. Love,



***Kookie***

## I AM WHO I AM

By Sr. Suzanne Elizabeth

Taking a walk around the lake, as I have for the past 20 years, I am glad to be bundled up for the cool breeze blowing downstream after a good rain and snow flurries in the night. I needed to get out and stretch my legs and breathe the fresh air. How lovely to be able to walk with no pain in the back and knees, in no hurry. I can't seem to be in a hurry these days.

How good it is to have the freedom to be who I am and not try to be who I was 20 years ago, much faster and adventuresome. There is a new sense of contentment to just be who I am in the present moment, with a sense of peace, and desire to remain in the warm light of the day.



I think of God with me and God's name, I AM WHO I AM. I reflect that we are made in the image of God, called human beings, not human-doers. I reflect that I have been called to be 'me' and not try to be anyone else 'better than me.' I am not called to try to be a Mother Teresa or St. Mary, yet by their positive attributes they showed us the way of faith, obedience and good works. Jesus was the perfect Way, Truth, Light, and Life for me to follow. I am called to follow as I am in the present moment, not even as I was able to be 20 years ago.

I rejoice in this new day and present moment, reveling in God's presence in the beauty and light and fresh breeze all about me, singing praise and thanks to God, and knowledge of God who is I AM Who I AM, and give thanks for this message to be who I am, ever striving to be for the greater glory of God.

## *St. John Baptist School*

*Dear Alumnae, Former Students and Staff,*

*We have received so much news from all of you that a special edition of Alumnae News will be sent out in January. We also plan to put it on the Community's website at [www.csjb.org](http://www.csjb.org). This comes to all of you with prayers and best wishes for the Christmas season and the New Year.*

*From all the Sisters*

## News From Daytop



During the course of each year, students from Daytop, the center for teens in our school, come to do volunteer work. Teams of boys and girls volunteer their time handling the mailing of this *Community Notes* newsletter. Others come to help on the grounds. They come with enthusiasm and generosity, and we are grateful for their help. Recently, two young men came to create a garden where we had just a pile of dirt in preparation for our Open House. Others helped to direct traffic and to act as hostesses at our gathering. We are grateful for all of their assistance and their energy.

The annual Holiday Brunch to celebrate Hanukkah and Christmas was held in mid-December, and the Daytop choir performed for an audience of about 200 board members, professional assistants, faculty and friends. The decorations, food, and performance were “over the top” and very inspiring. The return of Father Joe Hennen, retired founder of Daytop New Jersey, was a special feature. The opportunity to be a part of this unique program for teens is a blessing to all of us.



**Sr. Barbraa Jean receives the annual “rent” of \$1.00**



**Sr. Pamela, Michelle, and Sr. Eleanor Francis enjoy brunch served by Daytop students**

## New Portable Labyrinth

A new portable labyrinth has been donated to the Community, and we are grateful to be able to share this form of walking meditation in the wintertime when before, these opportunities were restricted to months of the year when the outdoor labyrinth was easily used. We will also be able to take this 20 foot canvas labyrinth to parishes for retreats and workshops.

Labyrinth walking is an ancient practice that has been revived in recent years in many Christian churches, as well as in the field of alternative medicine, where relaxation of the mind has been found to aid in healing.

Our labyrinth is a modified version of the famous one in Chartres Cathedral in France. The pattern is based on the cross with circular bands around it. In this photograph, the top of the cross faces the altar and the side pieces are outside of the picture.





## News from Good Shepherd Home

Sister Jane wrote in mid December to say that another abandoned baby had been brought to the home, and he has been taken to the annex in Batibo, the secondary location for orphans that the Benedictine Sisters of Bethany have opened in Cameroon. We are in constant contact with the sisters there, and through the support of several parishes, we have been able to help them through all the stages of development of this orphanage, which started with one child and one house a little over ten years ago, and now has over 100 children in two locations.

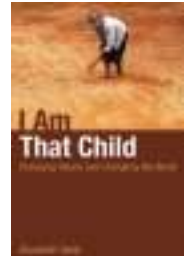


**Sr. Jane with Ben, five years old**

The home is now raising thousands of chickens for sale, and they are popular in the local market. This has helped the sisters there to have some degree of sustainability. Sister Jane, who founded this home, is hoping to come to the United States in the spring.

She now has a new passport, and must apply to the American embassy for a visa. When she comes, there will be the release of a video that was made last year by a team of Spanish TV producers. This video tells the story of the home and the children in a series of songs performed by the children themselves. It is hoped that the showing and sale of this video will bring new support for the children.

Another new development for Good Shepherd Home is the anticipated publication of a book called *I am that Child*, by the Rev. Elizabeth Geitz. Elizabeth traveled to the home several years ago, and has devoted her time to making a difference for the children at Good Shepherd Home. In reading it, one hears the voices of the children as they speak from their experience of being orphaned in a third world country. The release date will be February 1, 2012. Watch for it. It will be well worth reading.



**The Good Shepherd Home local board with new babies  
(There is also an American board that governs finances)**



**An abandoned baby newly arrived  
at the Home**

# *Celtic Journeys 2012*

## *Ireland May 6-16*

*Please join us for yet another journey to the Emerald Isle. Many have gone with us before, and returned saying it was beyond all their expectations, indeed, a dream come true...*

Dublin, Book of Kells, Glendalough, Rock of Cashel, Blarney, Killarney, Ring of Kerry, Dingle Peninsula, the Burren, Connemara, Kylemore Abbey, Aran Islands, Galway, Clonmacnoise...



## *Cornwall and England's Southwest Sept 9-18*

*The Southwest of England is a land of legend, of craggy cliffs, high moorlands, and secluded wooded valleys. It is an area rich with cathedrals and pre-Christian sites. And Cornwall, the Celtic Kingdom once known as Belerion, or 'shining lands', for the magical quality of its light...*

Winchester, Exeter, Dartmoor, Bodmin Moor, St Ives, Penwith area,  
Salisbury, Bath, Wells, Glastonbury, Stonehenge, Windsor...

### **For more details:**

Phone 973 543 4641 ext 4 Sr Margo

Email [info@celticjourneys.org](mailto:info@celticjourneys.org)

Visit our Website: [www.celticjourneys.org](http://www.celticjourneys.org)

*Come with us! You won't regret it...*

# Coming Events

CONVENT OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST: *Fall 2011*

82 West Main Street, Box 240, Mendham, NJ 07945 973-543-4641 CSJB@csjb.org www.csjb.org

**CENTERING PRAYER** **Thursdays 7:15 - 8:30 p.m.** Join us for a quiet hour and learn a new way to pray. Centering Prayer is a method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer, prayer in which we experience God's presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself. For info, call Sr. Barbara Jean 973-543-4641 ext. 1 or [srbj@csjb.org](mailto:srbj@csjb.org).

**LABYRINTH WALKS** **Jan. 7, 21; Feb. 11, 25, March 10, 24, Apr. 14, 28, May 5, 19. June 2 2-4 p.m.** Walk our labyrinth and learn about this ancient way of prayer. Phone Sr. Barbara Jean or e-mail [srbj@csjb.org](mailto:srbj@csjb.org) Meet at the white Convent Building.

**FABRIC OF FAITH** **1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursdays, 10-3.** Learn about ecclesiastical embroidery and the preservation of church vestments. \$10 includes lunch. Contact Sr. Suzanne Elizabeth at [srse@csjb.org](mailto:srse@csjb.org) or 973-543-4641 x 5.

**THE EPIPHANY PARTY!** **Sunday, January 8, 7:30 p.m.** This event is for old and new friends of the Community. Enjoy an evening of music and fellowship with the Sisters. Bring a dessert!

**ENNEAGRAM WORKSHOP – Second Level** **Saturday, Feb. 4, 2012, 9 a.m.-4 p.m.**

Learn about your Enneagram type and the way in which it helps you to understand yourself and others. For those who have done Level One and those who take a preliminary test to determine their type. Conductor: Sr. Laura Katharine. Held at Convent. \$40 includes lunch. Email Jean Marie DuHamel at [network@csjb.org](mailto:network@csjb.org).

**WINTER SEARCH PROGRAM** **For those seeking God's Call in their lives**

**February 17-20, 2012.** A Live-in with the Sisters to experience the Religious Life. Write or e-mail Sr. Barbara Jean 973-543-4641 ext. 1 or [srbj@csjb.org](mailto:srbj@csjb.org)

**COMING HOME AGAIN:** **A Day Retreat to Reconnect with Nature conducted by Fletcher**

**Harper: Saturday, February 25, 2012. 9:30 - 3:30 p.m.** In this contemplative retreat for people of any spiritual tradition, we will, through discussion and experiential exercises, practice reconnecting with our roots in nature. Fletcher Harper, one of the nation's premier interfaith environmental leaders, will give you the opportunity to recall and discuss outdoor spiritual experiences, and to learn basic outdoor meditation techniques. Presentation, discussion, silence, and a shared midday lunch. \$50 includes lunch. **RSVP to Interweave 908-277-2120 or [information@interweave.org](mailto:information@interweave.org)**

**SERENITY: A WAY OF LIFE:** **Sat. Mar. 3, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.** Are you struggling with depression or anxiety? Does it feel as if you have no time for you in your life? Come to a workshop with Ruth Altamura Roll, MA, NCC. LCP a Licensed Professional Counselor. Info: [sr-pamela@csjb.org](mailto:sr-pamela@csjb.org) 973-543-4641 ext. 9. \$65 includes lunch.

**MANUSCRIPT ILLUMINATION RETREAT**

May 9-11, 2012 Wed. Noon - Fri. 4.00 pm led by Patricia Miranda, Founder and Gallery Director, Miranda Fine Arts, Port Chester, NY Cost: \$315 (Full Board) Day only \$260 (meals included) All materials provided. For more information click [here](#) or contact Sr. Pamela at 973-543-4641 X 9 email: [sr-pamela@csjb.org](mailto:sr-pamela@csjb.org).

**COMMEMORATION DAY** **June 23 at 10:30 a.m.**

Mark the date now for our Community's annual celebration with Associates and friends. Solemn Eucharist Saturday, June 23 at 10:30 a.m. Lunch and fellowship on the cloister. Celebrant and Preacher: The Rt. Rev. Prince Singh

**ST. JOHN BAPTIST SCHOOL ALUMNAE REUNION** **Sunday, June 26, 2012**

For all Alumnae, former students and staff of St. John Baptist School - Mark the date now for a great picnic and the chance to see old friends. Family and friends welcome. Bring a dish to share. RSVP Lynn Mullin 908-879-9382. or Sr. Barbara Jean at [srbj@csjb.org](mailto:srbj@csjb.org)



We have gone Green and wish to go greener!  
Please let us know if you would prefer to have the Newsletter sent to you by  
email.



**GOD BLESS YOU IN THE NEW YEAR!**

Come to the

**EPIPHANY PARTY**

January 8, 7:30 p.m.