



Sister Benedict gives a presentation about life at the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Westfield to students from St. Francis Xavier School in Winooski.



Students made and sold rosaries like these for the benefit of the monastery.

## Students forge bond with nuns through

The joy of youth met the joy of consecrated religious life May 21 as sixth-grade students from St. Francis Xavier School in Winooski visited the Benedictine nuns of the Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Westfield, the children in their blue and white school uniforms on one side of the grille that separates the nuns from the outside world — the nuns in their black-and-white habits on the other.

The students in Teresa Hawes' sixth-grade homeroom visit the monastery each spring. This year they attended Mass, listened to a presentation about the nuns' lives, presented a brief musical program and hand-delivered the proceeds they earned by making colorful rosaries out of nylon fishing cord.

Several years ago Hawes showed one of the rosaries made at the monastery to her class, and students were enthusiastic about learning to make them. She returned to the monastery to learn how to tie the knots in such a way to make "beads" on the rosary, and then taught her students.

As a service project, the students make the rosaries as well as one-decade strands and sell them at a school fair and at area parishes for \$2.50 and \$1, respectively. "People always give more," said Hawes, who teaches French and religion at St. Francis Xavier School.



Students from St. Francis Xavier School in Winooski look at the nylon fishing cord used to make rosaries.



St. Francis Xavier teacher Teresa Hawes works on a rosary.

This year, thanks to the students' efforts and individual generosity, the nuns gratefully received \$550.

At first it was difficult for Chris Prim, 11, to work on the rosaries. "I could barely get the string wrapped around, but once I got the hang of it, it was really, really easy," he said.

"The fact that they work on those rosaries ... and give the proceeds to us makes us feel part of their work," said Mother Laurence Couture, prioress.

Sixteen sisters were present for the presentation; 14 students traveled by school bus for the visit.

While there, Sister Benedict stood

behind the grille to tell them about the life of the nuns and their focus on prayer and work. "That sums up the whole of our life," she said.

"Ora et labora" is Latin for prayer and work.

She said prayer is the most important

part of the nuns' life, and they pray frequently during the day. The nuns consecrate their life to God and take vows of stability, poverty, chastity and obedience.





(Photo by Cori Fugere Urban)

Mother Laurence Couture (right) and other Benedictine nuns smile during a recent visit with schoolchildren.

## rosary project

The latter she surmised, is the most difficult to understand for individuals today who have been taught to assert their independence and “be their own person.”

She said for the nuns, obedience means listening to the voice of God as expressed by their superior, their Rule and the community. “Out of love, we submit ourselves ... to imitate Christ.”

The nun explained that the grille is a symbol of their being separated exclusively for God’s service.

Their work entails the work of the mind – spiritual reading – and the work of their hands; their manual labor includes cooking, housekeeping, gardening and canning, hosting guests for quiet and reflection and making altar bread for use in churches throughout the United States and in Canada.

“We work pretty much in silence,” she said, “in order that we can keep united to God.”

The nuns enjoy one or two half-hours of recreation a day that includes talking, walking outside, playing games and even tobogganing in the winter. “We do everything a family would because we are a family of sisters,” Sister Benedict said.

Jesse Gaudette, principal of St. Francis Xavier School, accompanied the students on their visit. “You can teach about vocations in the classroom or show (students) in real life,” he said. “They can read a book or we can tell them in the classroom (about monastic life) or we can take them here and they can see it, they can touch it, they can live it.”

Hawes said she is always amazed with the way the monastery touches the depths of the students’ beings. “They come back radiant. It’s about the life that is lived here that resonates in their baptismal grace, and it shines.”

Zack Roy, 12, appreciated hearing the Latin used dur-



(Photo by Pat Gore)

Girls work on rosaries for a project to benefit the Benedictine nuns in Westfield.

ing Mass and learning about the nuns’ way of life.

“Their life inspires people to be part of the Church,” commented Brady Spencer, 12. “It’s quite inspiring to see these people living here and worshipping God every day.”

Amy Hester, 12, added, “You see these people give their lives every day for God and don’t have any worldly things. They keep the Church going through their prayers. Other people do everything they can to get rid of the Church. These nuns will stay loyal to their Church their whole life.”

“They give their lives up for Jesus because He gave His life for them,” said Maelyn Sartwell, 11.

Msgr. Richard Lavalley, pastor of St. Francis Xavier Church in Winooski, visited the nuns with the students. “It’s a whole new experience for (the students) to see something they have never seen before,” he said of nuns in habits living in an austere monastery. “They enter into a different way of life.”

He continued: “If you look into this cloister, you see joy, which is a primary Christian virtue. A Christian has to have joy.”

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