



Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey  
8400 Abbey Hill • Dubuque, Iowa 52003

Non-profit Org.  
US Postage  
PAID  
Dubuque, IA  
Permit No.477

Phone: (563) 582-2595

E-mail: [gail@olmabbey.org](mailto:gail@olmabbey.org)

Website: [mississippiabbey.org](http://mississippiabbey.org)

Candy phone: 1-563-556-6330

Candy website: [monasterycandy.com](http://monasterycandy.com)

Finally – we celebrated yet another jubilee: the Silver Jubilee of profession of our Sr Christine Reinhart. A native of Kitchener, Ontario, Sr Christine joined the School Sisters of Notre Dame after college and taught with them for 10 years. But before making final vows she realized this was not where God was calling her. Much as she loves Canada, we have no English-speaking houses of women there, so she gave up not only family but even homeland to enter our monastery in 1988. With her sweet voice and keyboard skills, Sr Christine has served our community for 20 years as chantress and choir director, and even longer as one of our organists. At present she also manages the shipping and warehouse of our candy business, and serves as our prioress. Family and friends drove from Canada for a truly blessed celebration as Sr Christine renewed her vows on the feast of St Bernard, August 20.

*Wishing you a joyous Advent and Christmas –*

*The Sisters of Mississippi Abbey*



*Sr Christine*

## OUR LADY OF THE MISSISSIPPI ABBAY

VOLUME 16 ISSUE 2  
NOVEMBER 2015



# monastery news

2015 has been an amazing year of jubilee for us. First of all, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the foundation of our monastery (4 November 1964) for a whole year, from July 11, 2014 to July 11, 2015. And we have some wonderful pictures of the close of the jubilee year to share with you.

BUT, 2015 is also the Golden Anniversary of our candy business, so we also have some memories – and pictures – of that, to share with you. If you receive our annual candy catalogue, you will have already seen some of the archival pictures going through the decades of candy making. And if you don't receive our catalogue – you should!

In our first newsletter this year we told about the Mass for the opening of our jubilee year, with nearly all our living foundresses present, and several days of enjoying their company and memories. But major celebrations were not the only part of our jubilee year. We came up with several practices to make the year spiritually special as well.

To help deepen our relationship with Jesus, we gave renewed effort to maintaining silence in our monastery, especially our cloister. For over 30 years it has been our practice to have a community meeting two or

three times a year to help us renew our silence. For our jubilee year, we extended this to short monthly meetings. And we took a refresher course in Trappist signs! As you may know, many centuries ago monastics developed a system of manual signs to express the most

common objects and actions of our daily life, to be able to communicate without disturbing the silence of others. Every Friday during our Jubilee Year Sr Gail demonstrated a couple of signs – a refresher course for most of us, but new to some of our newer members. And on Wednesday evenings we extended our daily 15 minutes of silent prayer together after Vespers to a half-hour, with Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

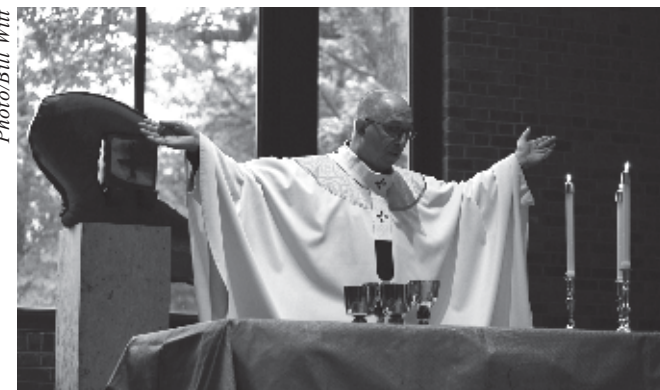
Our “Jubilee Committee” also had several special events for us. At one of them, a sister dressed in the old habit and we read an account of the foundation of Mississippi written by one of the sisters of our founding house, Mt St Mary's Abbey

in Wrentham, MA. On Christmas, we had a recollection of Christmas Past, with a display of the annual community Christmas cards (sent to family and a few friends), a replica of the first Christmas tree, and memories. During Lent, we had a reconciliation

Photo/Bill Witt



Photo/Bill Witt



*July 11, Mass closing our Jubilee Year*





July 11, Mass closing our Jubilee Year

ceremony, recalling some of our community's growing pains and difficult times, and God's providence through them.

Finally came the closing celebration of the Jubilee Year. Our July 2014 celebration had focused on our founding members, and our Order, with monks and nuns from other monasteries participating and Dom Mark of New Melleray presiding at the Mass. In July of 2015 we focused instead on former members and the local church. Six former members stayed in our guest houses for several days, joining us in choir and refectory, and we had several wonderful gatherings and memories of "how things were" when they were here. Then came the closing Mass. Our Archbishop, Michael Jackals, presided, and many friends joined us, along with representatives of the local religious congregations and of our own Associate groups.

Our jubilee year had one other event that is still not quite finished: we began work on a book about our monastery. For our 25th anniversary, in 1989, we put out a stapled 2-color booklet, with a substantial history of our monastery written by Penny Gold, a history professor

and friend of our community. This of course was in the days when color printing was an exotic expense, and our Silver Jubilee booklet was printed in brown on cream-colored paper.

Our new book, being printed around the same time as this newsletter, is far more substantial: 160 pages, with a spine, a sewn binding, and a cover with flaps. And above all, it will have over 170 wonderful color photos. You know all these black-and-white shots you've been seeing in our newsletters over the years? This is our opportunity to do real justice, in full color, to at least a fraction of the glorious photos we have. Especially in the last 20 years we have had a bonanza of gorgeous pictures taken by professional photographers, including our good friend Bill Witt, one of our Associates. The book, *A Life of Hope*, includes a short history of Christian monasticism, a history of Mississippi Abbey, and chapters on monastic spirituality. It will be available at our gift shop and also sold through our candy business.

Which brings us to the 50th Anniversary of Trappistine Creamy Caramels, a/k/a Monastery Candy. We reprint here an excerpt from our forthcoming book:



Working at candy in the 1970's

*When Mississippi Abbey was founded in 1964, we tried our hands at a variety of small crafts: making wreaths, cookies, etc. But we needed something we could produce on a larger scale, and in 1965 our Sr Rosemary returned to Wrentham to learn how to cook caramel. And we have been making our famous creamy caramels ever since!*

*Within a few years we started branching out with our own "product line." A local Dominican sister showed us how to temper chocolate and coat our caramels with it. This was in the days of grills and full habits, and Sr Owen sat on one side of the grill in a tiny room with a little pot of chocolate, while two of our sisters on the other side copied what she was doing. Since that one lesson, we have been selling chocolate-coated caramels.*

*We sell annually about 60,000 lbs of caramel products, and 2,000 lbs each of our other candies. Our business is extremely seasonal, with the vast majority of our sales made for Christmas gifts. As the caramels have a limited shelf-life, we have to produce the bulk of them in the months September to December, a time of year known to us as "Candy Season." Almost all our other work is put on hold while we go daily to make candy. Even this discipline has its benefits, requiring each sister to let go of other jobs for which she is responsible, in order to participate in the common work which earns our livelihood.*

*As our community grew, so did our business. Our original "candy house" was a large mobile home. In 1979 a friend in the construction business offered to double the size of the building, and added an attic for storage – all at no cost to us. This wonderful gift served us well for over 20 years, but eventually we needed a sturdier structure actually designed for manufacturing. For example, as large semi's replaced smaller delivery trucks, they could no longer get to our little loading docks; nor had we forklifts*



Our new "candy house," built in 2002



Pouring a batch of caramel

*to handle pallets. When a delivery arrived, we would stop production, set some rollers in place, break open the pallets in the truck, and form a chain line to hand boxes up through a trap door into the attic! Thanks to the kindness of many donors, in 2001 we broke ground for a real factory, completed in the summer of 2002. It is beautiful and fully functional and enables us to support ourselves and our life of prayer.*

*Our candy business gives our community a common work, a time and place where we work together on a shared task. After the liturgy and the common table, common work is perhaps the most important element binding our community together. Candy-making is not always easy work; some of it requires heavy lifting, or else doing the same small actions over and over, which can be very wearing on the body, especially as we age. In this we feel our kinship with so many who labor with their hands.*

*Running our own business is hard work but also great fun. We try to work in a prayerful way and to offer products with a certain quality. And we can say in all honesty, we have never tasted any other caramels as good as our own!*