Blog

Religious Life




The necrology board at Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas, lists the names and dates of sisters who have gone before, a daily reminder for the community to carry them in prayer. (GSR photo/Helga Leija)



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November 26, 2025

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At our Benedictine monastery, just outside the chapel, we have a necrology board that holds the names and dates of the sisters who have gone before us. At Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas, each day a sister draws a number, finds the corresponding name on the board, and returns the number to its box. We carry that sister in prayer throughout the day, asking her to watch over us and intercede for us. As Thanksgiving approaches, this ritual draws me into a deeper sense of gratitude for the women of my community.

Some names on the necrology board are underlined in gold, marking those who have served as prioresses. When I draw their names, I'm reminded of how their leadership shaped the monastery I transferred to just a few years ago. I think of Mother Aloysia Northman, whose vision built our choir chapel and encouraged sisters to pursue higher education, strengthening our mission for the future. Mother Alfred Schroll was a scholar who gave us a library, student union and residence halls that supported generations of students and sisters.

Mother Noreen Hurter also comes to mind — her heart for ecumenical outreach, refugee ministry and peace work invited us all to live with wider compassion. And then there is Mother Lucy Dooley, remembered for her warmth and joy, who expanded our educational mission and founded Donnelly College in Kansas City, Kansas, which continues to transform the lives of many students and their families.

I am grateful for Mother Mary Austin Schirmer, who guided the community through the changes of the Second Vatican Council. Under her leadership, the Divine Office began to be prayed in English, roles shifted, and habits were modified. With concern for our aging sisters, she built the Dooley Center, a skilled nursing facility for our future needs. She was known as an effective administrator, a good listener, and a warm, compassionate friend.

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This year, my gratitude has taken on an even more personal meaning. Recently, I was able to bring my mother home to the Dooley Center to receive much needed care. My community and the staff there have received her with open arms. Their welcome reflects the same spirit of hospitality and love of the sisters whose names are written on the necrology board.

Bringing my mother here was made possible through the support of Sr. Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, our current prioress. Her encouragement and understanding of my situation have created the space for my mother to come to our Dooley Center. She arranged for things to move very smoothly, allowing me to continue to live my monastic life fully, while also honoring my role as a daughter. I am infinitely grateful .

This Thanksgiving, I'm especially thankful for my whole community — the women on the necrology board whose dedication and prayer continue to shape us, and the women who walk beside me now. Their faithfulness strengthens me as I live my monastic life of prayer, *lectio divina* and daily life while caring for my mother.

Do you have someone in your life who has shaped you, supported you, or walked alongside you through challenges?

I am deeply grateful for the grace of belonging to a community that walks with me. Their love continues to guide me in my Benedictine monastic life.



Benedictine Sr. Mary Elizabeth Schweiger draws a number from the necrology board at Mount St. Scholastica, a daily ritual to remember and pray for the sisters who have gone before. As Thanksgiving approaches, this practice deepens gratitude for the women of the Benedictine community of Mount St. Scholastica.(GSR photo/Helga Leija)