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'Young' Benedictines meet for historic gathering

by Cheryl Wittenauer

ATCHISON, KAN. -- Nearly 100 Benedictine women who represent the future of the community in the United States gathered for the first meeting of its kind earlier this year at Mount St. Scholastica here in the nation's Heartland.

The women, who are 55 and younger, came to Atchison at the end of January for the first nationwide gathering of women from all Benedictine monasteries in the United States and Puerto Rico.

One of the organizers, Sr. Bridget Dickason of Atchison, said it has become apparent that, given their smaller numbers, women in the 55-and-under age group need to cross federation lines, become better-acquainted, network and cooperate with each other.

The gathering was aimed at providing a forum for younger sisters to meet, forge relationships, discuss common interests and learn from Benedictine leaders how to maintain an ancient monastic tradition in a 21st-century world.

Sr. Vicki Ix of Bristow, Va., one of the organizers, said the gathering was "historic."

"This was the first time we came together to address a certain population in the Benedictine world," Ix said. "This age group is very vibrant, at the height of generativity. We're the worker bees, with gifts we want to give. I can't underestimate the power of the gesture. The common thread is the hope, the common vision of a future....We all left very jacked up about being Benedictine."

Opening remarks by Benedictine historian Sr. Ephrem Hollermann of St. Joseph, Minn., laid the groundwork for the rest of the four-day meeting. Hollermann told the stories of pioneer Benedictine women who came to the United States in the 1800s to start communities despite incredible obstacles.

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