TEACHERS PANEL, BENET Melk 2026

PAT

Welcome to this presentation of the Benedictine Teachers Panel. The presentation is in four parts, based on questions we considered over a series of online discussions. In Part One, the teachers will give an overview of their school communities, and share a bit about their background, upbringing, and introduction to the Rule of St. Benedict.

PART 1

ESTEBAN (1)

I come from a Benedictine school in Envigado, Colombia, very close to Medellín. Our school goes from Pre-Kindergarten to Grade 11, so we accompany students from the beginning of their school journey until they prepare to leave for university.

One important part of our identity is our relationship with the monastery. The monks do not run the school day to day; our teachers and leadership team are lay people. But the monastery helps guide our institutional vision and Benedictine identity, and a monk serves as a link between the monastery and the school. Students experience this connection through a daily Lectio Divina, using a recorded reflection prepared by our monk, and through Mass at least once a month.

Our community has also changed. Until 2016, the school was for boys only; that year we began opening the school to girls, and today we are a coeducational community.

I was not educated by the Benedictines myself. My experience with Benedictine education came later, when I was already a teacher. I grew up in Catholic schools, so faith, values, service, and the idea that education is about becoming a better person were already part of my formation. Later, I studied at the Pontifical Bolivarian University, and before joining the Benedictine community I also worked with the Bethlemitas Sisters. That experience taught me to see teaching as more than delivering a subject: it is about accompanying students and being part of their personal and human development.

Then I became a Benedictine teacher, and many things began to make sense. At first, I was learning about Saint Benedict, the Rule, and Benedictine education. But gradually I understood that Benedictine education does not happen only when we talk about Saint Benedict or study the Rule. It happens in everyday life: when I sit with a student and listen, when a family comes with a concern and we take time to understand it, and in the simple conversations that can become meaningful.

That has changed the way I understand the Rule. I discovered it as an adult, but I now see it as something that can be lived in ordinary school relationships.

SISTER ANN MARY, OSB (1)

THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE IS AN ADDITION

I am Sr. Ann Mary Chakkalakal OSB, a member of the Congregation of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Lioba. END ADDITION

I was born and brought up in Kerala where Christianity, especially Catholic faith, is very much part of the social and cultural life. Although India is predominantly Hindus as majorities, my own surroundings are deeply Christians and Catholics. Faith was therefore something very natural to me from childhood. So my journey of faith began in my childhood, in a deeply rooted Christian family, where my parents and family taught me faith more through their lives and love, than through words. I was also fortunate to be taught in the school run by religious sisters, who gave me a good education and a value-based atmosphere through their teaching and example.

However, honestly speaking, as a child, I knew about St. Benedict only by name and I had not understood the depth of Benedictine spirituality. That deeper understanding of St. Benedict, his Rule and the richness of Benedictine spirituality and his contribution as the father of Western monasticism, came later, when I joined the Congregation of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Lioba. I began my teaching ministry in 1994 in a rural area of Northern India where my Congregation had the first established school. Though the area was under developed then, today it has developed considerably, and it gives me great joy to see that many of my former students settled there and elsewhere leading happy family life.

It was a journey of gradually discovering and living the Benedictine spirit—through prayer, listening, discipline, community living, hospitality, and care for others and we tried to live them every day. I believe that because we lived these values from the depth of our hearts, our students and colleagues could also experience and imbibe them. They remember not only the lessons we taught, but also the values they received. This gives me great satisfaction, contentment and sense of gratitude. And even today, I would say that I am still learning and growing in this spirit. I am proud to be a Benedictine Educator.

THE FOLLOWING SECTION IS SISTER ANN'S ADDITION:

OUR EDUCATIONAL MINISTRY AT ST.LIOBA ACADEMY

Respected dignitaries , members of the Panel and the participants, I am Sr. Ann Mary Chakkalakal OSB, a member of the Congregation of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Lioba. The Charism of our Congregation is to respond to the needs of the present world and we try to live it through four main apostolates: Education, Healthcare, Pastoral Ministry and Social Service. Our mission extends to different parts of India and abroad.

Since my religious profession, I have been engaged in education field, serving as a Mathematics teacher in Madhya Pradesh, Northern India, from 1994. At present, I serve as the Vice Principal of St. Lioba Academy, Perambra, Kerala - a CBSE affiliated Co-Educational school established in 2013, with around 300 students from Pre-KG to Class X.

Together with our Principal, Sr. Jain Mathew – a visionary and dynamic leader, six efficient members of our congregation, around 30 committed lay teachers from different religious and

cultural backgrounds, and seven dedicated non-teaching staff, we share the mission of education, respecting, listening and learning from one another.

Each child comes with a unique personality, ability, family background and need and we welcome them. Our efficient counsellor supports students in their personal concerns and daily challenges, while separate awareness programmes by the health and wellness educators help them to understand personal health, hygiene, wellness and healthy habits.

For us, education begins with prayer. Each day begins with the teachers gathering for prayer, Scripture reading and reflection followed by the morning assembly where the children come together for prayer and the pledge. Speeches, skits, dances, dramas, awareness programmes and various activities on relevant topics performed by the students provide them opportunities for both expression and formation.

We strive to make Benedictine values such as prayer, discipline, respect, hospitality, compassion and responsibility a lived experience. Students are reminded that discipline and respect are not merely rules; gradually, they help them become self-controlled, responsible and respectful persons.

We celebrate festivals, conduct competitions, awareness programmes and public Campaigns providing opportunities for the children to grow in confidence and co- operation. Along with academics, we provide opportunities through Co-Curricular activities such as karate, skating, dance, music, physical education and other activities for children to discover and develop their talents.

One important Benedictine value we consciously impart is listening. The Rule of St. Benedict begins with the invitation, —Listen, my son,...ll We encourage our children to listen attentively—to God, to their teachers, to their parents, to one another and we remind them that good listening leads to understanding, respect and peaceful community life.

As a part of encouraging our students to value the dignity of work, we have introduced opportunities for students to engage in manual labour and simple practical tasks. Through these experiences, they learn that every kind of honest work has value. It helps them become more responsible, self-reliant and respectful of the work of others. This connects well with the Benedictine spirit of “Ora et Labora – Prayer and Work.” We want our children not only to learn through books, but also through doing, serving and working together.

We are proud of our first two batches of Class X for achieving a 100% result, which brought great joy to our school community. Yet, I believe that the deeper fruit of education is not only academic achievement, but the kind of persons our students become - how they treat others and how responsibly they use their talents.

My years in education have taught me something beautiful: while we form children, they also form us. Their questions, struggles, talents and even their mistakes have taught me patience, creativity, perseverance and compassion. Therefore, being a Vice Principal is more than an administrative responsibility for me. It is an opportunity to live my Benedictine vocation through education—to accompany young people, support teachers, build community, and make our school a place where Gospel and Benedictine values are lived in everyday life.

As I come to the end, I remain deeply grateful to my Congregation and to my institution for giving me the opportunity to serve in this ministry and, today it has been a joy and a privilege to share these reflections. Thank you for giving me this opportunity and, above all, for your patient and gracious listening.

NATALIE (1)

I was raised in a Catholic family and attended a Catholic school. Teaching for over 25 years, I have taught in a range of Catholic schools. I began my career teaching all boys at St Laurence's College which was run by Christian Brothers under the guiding ethos and tradition of Edmund Rice. I then moved to teaching all girls at All Hallows' School, a Catholic girls college guided in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy where the inspirations are drawn from the life and faith of Catherine McAuley.

I now have the privilege of teaching at Lourdes Hill College, a prestigious all-girls Catholic school in Brisbane which is the capital city of the state of Queensland in Australia. We have just over 1000 students from Years 5 to 12. Located just five kilometres from Brisbane's CBD, the College occupies a unique position overlooking the Brisbane River and the city beyond. Its beautiful setting, perched high above the river on what was once described as a great hill, provides a striking backdrop to a school community with a rich history and a deep sense of place.

In 2026, Lourdes Hill College celebrates its 110th anniversary. The story of the College can be traced back to 1916, when Archbishop of Brisbane James Duhig invited the Sisters of the Good Samaritan of the Order of St Benedict to establish schools in Brisbane. Thirteen Sisters travelled by sea from Sydney, making their way up the east coast of Australia to establish a new community and school. When they arrived at the site, Archbishop Duhig was struck by the resemblance of the great hill to Lourdes in France, the place where Mary is believed to have appeared to the young Bernadette Soubirous. From this connection came the name Lourdes Hill.

Today, that history remains woven into the identity of the College. While Lourdes Hill has grown and evolved significantly over more than a century, its foundations remain firmly rooted in the Good Samaritan Benedictine tradition. When I first came to Lourdes Hill, I knew very little about St Benedict or the values that lie at the heart of the Benedictine tradition. Like many people who join a Benedictine school from another doctrine, I was unfamiliar with the richness of this way of life and the profound influence it has on a community.

Teaching Religious Education gave me the opportunity to learn about the Rule of St Benedict and the values that shape our college. However, it was stepping into the role of Head of Year 7 that truly transformed my understanding. Welcoming the youngest members of our community was not simply about organising an Orientation program or helping students settle into a new school, it required me to live the Benedictine values of hospitality, respect, compassion and stewardship every day. I quickly realised that these values are not just taught—they are experienced. They are expressed in the way we welcome others, the way we listen, the way we

build relationships and the way we create a genuine sense of belonging. Over time, these values have become far more than words on a page. They have shaped the way I lead, the way I make decisions, and the way I seek to accompany young people and their families throughout their journey at our school.

How is the Benedictine Rule lived out at your school? The Benedictine ethos is interwoven into all aspects of life at Lourdes Hill College. The Rule of St Benedict is not simply something we teach our students; it is a way of being that shapes how we build relationships, nurture community and respond to the needs of others. Prayer and reflection are an important part of our daily and weekly rhythm. Staff begin each week together with a reading and reflection from The Rule, providing an opportunity to pause, listen and consider how Benedictine wisdom can inform our work. Students conclude each day with our college prayer, while Mass is offered weekly for those who wish to attend and celebrated as a whole-school community on significant feast days throughout the year.

Our House values are drawn directly from Benedictine tradition and include respect, compassion, listening, hospitality and stewardship. These values are visible throughout our college and, importantly, are brought to life through the experiences we provide for students. House competitions, celebration days and House projects create opportunities for students to develop a sense of belonging, work collaboratively and put these values into action.

Hospitality is particularly evident in the way we welcome new students and families. We continually refine our transition and orientation programs for students entering Years 5 and 7 to ensure that they authentically embody the Benedictine spirit of welcome. Every aspect of the experience is thoughtfully planned to foster a genuine sense of belonging and connection, enabling students and their families to feel valued, supported and confident as they begin their journey with us.

Our Big Sister/Little Sister Program provides another practical expression of Benedictine care. Older students take responsibility for supporting and guiding younger students, modelling compassion, inclusion and service. In doing so, our students learn that leadership is not simply about having a position; it is about recognising the needs of others and using our gifts to support them.

Service and social justice are also central to our community. Students are encouraged to recognise the needs of others, respond with compassion and understand that each individual has the capacity to make a difference. These opportunities allow the Benedictine value of service to move beyond an idea and become something our students experience and practise.

Finally, our approach to behaviour management is grounded in restorative practice. Rather than simply focusing on consequences, we work alongside students and families to encourage accountability, self-reflection, reconciliation and personal growth. This reflects the Benedictine understanding that relationships matter and that mistakes can provide opportunities for learning, restoration and renewal.

Ultimately, we strive to ensure that the Benedictine Rule is evident not only in what we teach, but in how we welcome, how we listen, how we lead, how we respond to one another and how

we serve our community. In this way, the Rule continues to provide a living framework for forming young women who are compassionate, responsible and committed to making a positive difference in the world.

GEOFFREY (1)

My journey into Benedictine education is quite interesting because I was not educated by the Benedictines myself. I grew up in a Catholic family, and my parents made sure that I was brought up in the Catholic faith. I went through baptismal classes, was baptized, and was brought up participating in the life of the Church.

My own education was in mainly public institutions. I went to Riaranga DOK Primary School, then St. Paul's Gekano High School, Machakos Teachers Training College, and later the University of Nairobi. After completing college, I started teaching in 2004, initially in privately owned schools.

At that time, I honestly knew very little about Benedictine education. I had not heard about the Rule of St. Benedict, and I had never really interacted with Benedictine spirituality.

That changed when I joined St. Scholastica Catholic School in 2009. St. Scholastica Catholic School is located in Ruaraka, Nairobi, Kenya, in an urban setting along Thika Road. It is a mixed school, serving both boys and girls, with learners from pre-primary through Grade 9. The school offers both day and boarding programmes. It is owned and managed by the Missionary Benedictine Sisters, although lay teachers and staff are responsible for much of the day-to-day teaching and administration. The school seeks to integrate academic excellence with Catholic and Benedictine values in the formation of the whole learner.

I started as a class teacher, and over the years I was given different responsibilities. I became involved in the examination department, later took charge of the boarding department, became Deputy Head Teacher, and eventually became Head Teacher.

So, my understanding of Benedictine education really developed gradually through experience. It was not something I came with; it was something I discovered as I worked within the school and interacted with the Missionary Benedictine Sisters.

One of the things that struck me from the beginning was the emphasis on values. Discipline and service, for example, were very evident in the way the school was run. I also became familiar with the Sisters and the use of OSB, and gradually I began to understand that there was a deeper spirituality behind many of the things we were doing.

PART TWO

PAT

In Part Two, we discussed how being part of a Benedictine school community has influenced their own teaching practice. How have they evolved as educators?

SISTER ANN MARY, OSB (2)

As a member of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Lioba, Benedictine spirituality has gradually become a part of my life, and naturally, it finds expression in my daily living. Values such as prayer, discipline, hospitality, care for others, and service have influenced the way I relate to my students and to the people around me especially fellow educators.

Over the years I came to realise how the teaching is evolved, from primarily imparting knowledge to nurturing the whole person, especially values, responsibility, service, and community life. By interacting with students with patience, love and empathy, I could help many of them recognise their potential and channelize it positively. I have learned that the students often remember how I made them feel and what values I lived before them.

The real success of education, for me, is seen when the values learned in school continue to influence how my students' work, serve others, build their families and contribute meaningfully to the society.

How has working in a Benedictine Community influenced us in our relationships with students and fellow educators? Benedictine spirituality has taught me to see every person with respect, patience, compassion and a spirit of accompaniment.

a) Relationship with my students :-I have over these years learned that teaching is truly a two-way journey. Students come from different backgrounds, culture and have different abilities, personalities and needs. When we take time to listen (The very first word of the Prologue of the Rule of St.Benedict), understand them, guide them with patience, and channelize their talents in the right direction, we often discover wonderful personalities and great potentials in them.

In fact, I can truly say that my students have made me a better teacher rather refined the craft as a teacher. They have taught me to be patient and to look beyond their limitations. One of the greatest joys for me is to see my students are doing well in life and serving society through different professions like educator, doctor, engineer, business men, lawyer, army men etc.

b) Relationship with my fellow educators :-Before beginning the school day, the teachers gather in the Principal's office, where we read a passage from the Bible and begin the day together. This simple practice strengthens our unity and reminds us that our work is not merely a job but also a service. And it has created a spirit of closeness, mutual respect, good rapport and a real sense of community among us. Our Benedictine spirit is also reflected in the daily rhythm of our school. We begin the day with a common assembly, prayer and pledge, followed by a thought or reflection on the importance of the day. Students put up dance drama, skit and various

performances relating to the topic inculcating the values .The students also pray a short prayer before meals and a prayer before leaving the school. These simple practices help us to keep God at the centre of our daily life.

c) Our community life as Benedictine Sisters gives us a structured rhythm of prayer. We come together for prayer several times a day. We listen to the Gospel of the day and reflect upon it, and before night prayer we read a passage from the Rule of St. Benedict. The Rule reminds us of the values of Benedictine life such as to live each day with discipline, balance, humility, listening and love.

One of the things I value most in Benedictine education is the importance given to the person. A student is not simply a learner who has to achieve good marks. Each student comes with a story, a family, gifts, struggles, dreams and possibilities. Our task as teachers is to recognise that person and accompany them.

Young people live in a world of rapid technological change, social media, competition, individualism and uncertainty. They have access to enormous amounts of information, but they still need wisdom. They need people who will listen to them, accompany them and help them to distinguish what is truly valuable from what is merely attractive or popular.

Most importantly, the values are manifested through our way of living. When students see us praying, working sincerely, treating colleagues with respect, welcoming others, remaining patient in difficulties and serving without seeking recognition, they experience the Rule through our lives.

Our influence as teachers is often much greater than we realise.As teachers, therefore, I believe we are called to be more than instructors. We are witnesses and companions. Perhaps the most important question for us is not, “How much have my students learned from me?” but rather, “What kind of persons are they becoming because they encountered me?”

The words of the Rule of St Benedict, “Listen carefully, my child,” speak very strongly to me. In today's world, where everyone is speaking and there is so much noise, teaching young people to truly listen is a precious gift. For me, this is perhaps the greatest gift we can offer students in 2026 is to help them how to listen, how to live with others and how to serve. Thus Education is not only bringing out the best in the students as Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation said, but also in building a community where everyone feels valued, respected and loved.

NATALIE (2)

When I reflect on my teaching philosophy over almost three decades in education, I realise that while my commitment to young people has never changed, the way I understand what it means to be an educator has transformed significantly. Early in my career, my focus was largely on teaching well—planning engaging lessons, maintaining high expectations, ensuring students achieved academically and creating classrooms where learning could flourish. I believed that if I was a knowledgeable, organised and caring teacher, I was doing my job well. And while those things remain important, I now see that they are only part of the story.

When I joined Lourdes Hill College, like many educators who enter a school with a particular charism, I initially saw the values as something to learn so I could teach them. However, I soon realised that Benedictine education is not simply about knowing the values—it is about allowing those values to shape who we become.

In my position at the college, I have always taken great pride in my role of being one of the first people to introduce students and their families to the Benedictine values that underpin our community. Every year I stand at the gates welcoming families who are anxious, excited and placing enormous trust in our community. Hospitality ceased to be a word on a poster; it became an intentional daily practice. I have learnt that the first smile, the first conversation, remembering a student's name, listening carefully to a parent's concern, or ensuring that no child ate lunch alone are all deeply Benedictine acts. They are expressions of seeing Christ in the other.

Over time, the Rule's invitation to "listen with the ear of your heart" became more than a beautiful phrase. It became a leadership philosophy. I became less interested in having all the answers and more interested in asking thoughtful questions. Less focused on solving every problem myself and more committed to walking alongside students, staff and families as they found their own way forward.

As my leadership responsibilities grew—from classroom teacher, to Head of Year, and now Head of Middle School—my understanding of success also changed. Earlier in my career, success may have been measured by results, programs or achievements. Today, I measure success differently. Success is the Year 7 student who finally believes she belongs. It is the parent who feels genuinely heard during a difficult conversation. It is the teacher who feels trusted to try something new because they know they will be supported. It is watching older students quietly mentor younger ones through our Big Sister–Little Sister Program, modelling compassion and service without seeking recognition.

Working in a Benedictine community has also profoundly shaped the way I relate to my colleagues. Leadership is less about directing and more about accompanying. St Benedict reminds us that wisdom is not confined to those in positions of authority. His instruction to consult the whole community has challenged me to continuously seek diverse perspectives, to genuinely listen before making decisions and to recognise that every member of a school community has something valuable to contribute.

In education today, where change is constant and demands are ever increasing, Benedictine spirituality offers a different rhythm. It reminds us that relationships come before programs, that presence is often more powerful than productivity, and that leadership begins with humility rather than authority.

One of the greatest gifts Benedictine education has given me is the understanding that formation is never complete. Eleven years later, I am still learning. I am still discovering what hospitality asks of me. I am still being challenged to listen more deeply, to exercise greater patience, to choose compassion over judgement and to create spaces where every person feels seen, valued and known.

As Head of Middle School, these values now underpin everything we do—from our Year 7 Orientation, where hospitality is intentionally woven through every experience, to our Compass Cards that celebrate students living our values, our Big Sister–Little Sister Program that nurtures belonging across year levels, our student leadership formation, and the countless everyday interactions that build a culture where every young person knows they matter.

If someone had asked me eleven years ago what Benedictine education was, I would have listed a set of values. Today, I would answer differently. Benedictine education is not something we deliver. It is something we live. It is found in the conversations we choose to have, the people we choose to notice, the way we welcome, the way we forgive, the way we lead and, perhaps most importantly, the way we remind every young person entrusted to our care that they are worthy of dignity, belonging and hope.

For me, that has been the greatest transformation in my teaching philosophy. I no longer see myself simply as someone who teaches students. I see myself as someone who is continually being formed alongside them. In a Benedictine community, we are all learners, we are all teachers, and we are all called to become more deeply human through the relationships we build with one another.

GEOFFREY (2)

One of the things that struck me from the beginning was the emphasis on values. Discipline and service, for example, were very evident in the way the school was run. I also became familiar with the Sisters and the use of OSB, and gradually I began to understand that there was a deeper spirituality behind many of the things we were doing.

As I became more exposed to Benedictine education and the Rule of St. Benedict, I started seeing education differently. For me, one value that has particularly stood out is stewardship.

As a Head Teacher, stewardship means taking care of the resources entrusted to us. We have a responsibility to ensure that school resources are used properly and are available for the benefit of the learners. But I have come to see stewardship as going beyond physical resources.

For me, people are also a responsibility entrusted to us. The teachers, the learners and the wider school community need to be cared for, supported and developed.

That has influenced the way I look at leadership. I don't want to see my role simply as managing people. I would rather see myself as developing people; helping teachers to grow, encouraging them to further their studies for them to become better professionals, and helping learners to discover and develop their potential.

So, if I were to describe my starting point, I would say I came into Benedictine education with a Catholic upbringing and a professional background in teaching, but without any prior knowledge of Benedictine spirituality. I encountered it as an adult, through my work at St. Scholastica.

And perhaps that is what makes the journey particularly meaningful for me. I am still learning. Benedictine education has become something I experience in my daily work, rather than simply something I have read about. It has influenced how I understand service, responsibility, stewardship and, most importantly, leadership.

Today, I would say that being a Benedictine educator is not just about working in a Benedictine school. It is about trying to live those values in the way I relate to people, make decisions, use the resources entrusted to me, and help others grow.

ESTEBAN (2)

As a Benedictine teacher, I feel that we are not simply trying to teach the Rule to our students. Through our daily interactions, we are bringing it to life. For me, “Listen” is probably the clearest example. We listen to students, families, and colleagues, and sometimes simply being willing to listen changes a relationship.

The closeness we have with our students is one of the things that makes Benedictine education special to me. When we are close to students, we know them beyond their grades: their personalities, families, challenges, and dreams. And that creates responsibility. If I know my students, I cannot simply see them as a number or a grade; I have to see the person.

There is another idea that is especially meaningful in my school. We have a prayer written by our Abbot, whose final words are: “Let us work together to build a more humane and more just world, where Your peace may reign.” I think that sentence captures much of what Benedictine education means to me. It is not simply about peace; it is about working together for a world that is more human and more just, and about the peace of Christ.

That connects what happens inside the school with what we hope our students will do outside it. We want them to be good students, but also people who can contribute to transforming society. So peace and social transformation are not just beautiful words; they are part of our strategic objectives and, hopefully, part of the way we educate.

If you ask me where my journey began, I would say it began with Catholic education, but my Benedictine journey began as a teacher. Today I see the Rule in the small things we do every day: listening, welcoming, accompanying, correcting when necessary, forgiving, beginning again, and working together. The Rule is not only something we teach. It is something we live.

PART THREE

PAT

In Part Three the teachers reflect on the value of a Benedictine education. What distinguishes it from what other schools offer? How does it prepare our students for the future?

NATALIE (3)

When I think about what a Benedictine school offers that another school may not, I think it goes deeper than having a set of values displayed on a wall or written into a school's mission. What makes a Benedictine school distinctive is that these values become a way of living, relating and learning together. They are grounded in a tradition that uniquely shapes the experience of the whole community.

At the heart of Benedictine education is a genuine sense of belonging. We see the school not simply as an institution, but as a community in which every person has dignity and a place. Hospitality is central to this. We are called to welcome others, to notice those who may be struggling or on the margins, and to make people feel that they truly belong. For a young person, particularly in a world where they can feel isolated despite being constantly connected, that sense of belonging is incredibly powerful.

Benedictine education is also about the formation of the whole person. Academic achievement matters, but so too do character, compassion, relationships, spirituality, resilience, service and the ability to make ethical choices. We are not simply asking, "What will this student achieve?" but "Who is this young person becoming?" We want our students to leave us not only well educated, but compassionate, grounded and prepared to contribute positively to the world.

There is also a different understanding of leadership. Benedictine leadership is servant leadership. It is not about status, power or popularity, but about using our gifts in service of others. We want our students to understand that true leadership begins with the question, "How can I make a difference for others?"

The Benedictine tradition also teaches us to listen with the ear of the heart. That is a powerful challenge for educators. It asks us to genuinely listen—to our students, our families and one another—not simply to respond or fix, but to understand. Alongside this is a culture of reflection, where we pause to consider what really matters, how our actions affect others and what we might do differently.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts Benedictine education offers young people today is a sense of balance. In a world of constant notifications, pressure and achievement, Benedictine spirituality reminds us that we are more than our productivity. There is value in prayer, silence, reflection, work, relationships and rest.

Ultimately however, I think the greatest distinction is the movement from "me" to "we." Students learn that they belong to something larger than themselves and that they have a responsibility to others. They are encouraged to ask not only, "What can I achieve?" but "Who am I called to

become, and how will I use my gifts in service of others?” Many schools have wonderful values. What makes a Benedictine school distinctive is the depth, history and practice behind those values. Respect, compassion, hospitality, service and community are not simply things we teach; they are ways we are called to live.

And perhaps that is the greatest gift of all. We don’t simply teach the Benedictine ethos—we have to embody it. Our students experience it in the way we welcome them, listen to them, challenge them, forgive them and care for them. It is a community where the values are not merely taught but lived together. This is something that is truly special.

GEOFFREY (3)

As a teacher at St. Scholastica Catholic School, I believe the question is not only about what we teach, but also about the kind of person our teaching is helping the learner to become. The world our learners are entering is very different from the one we grew up in. They are growing up with smartphones, social media, artificial intelligence and very quick access to information. They will face opportunities, but also distractions, pressure, misinformation and competition.

This is why I find the wisdom of St. Benedict and the Rule very relevant to our learners in 2026. The Rule speaks to ordinary things that we sometimes take for granted; listening, discipline, prayer, work, humility, responsibility, community and stewardship. These are values that can easily be seen in the daily life of our school.

For example, when we begin our day with prayer, we are reminding our learners that education is not only about academic achievement. We encourage them to put God at the centre of their lives. Through Mass, class prayers and other spiritual activities, they are given an opportunity to reflect on who they are and how they should relate with others.

The Benedictine principle of Ora et Labora is also very practical in our school. We tell our learners that prayer must be accompanied by work. A learner who wants good results has to attend lessons, do assignments, revise and seek help where necessary. When a learner struggles academically, we do not simply label the learner as weak. We organise support, remedial work and guidance because we believe that every learner can improve when given the right support.

We also see the value of discipline in everyday school life. Simple things such as reporting to class on time, observing the school uniform, keeping the classroom clean, completing assignments and following school routines may appear small, but they are actually preparing learners for life. We are teaching them that freedom comes with responsibility.

The Rule's emphasis on community is particularly important in a school like ours. We have learners from different backgrounds, abilities and family circumstances, yet they have to learn and live together. In classwork, group activities, games, clubs and school programmes, learners are expected to cooperate and appreciate one another. A learner who helps a classmate who is struggling with Mathematics, for example, is learning something more important than the Mathematics itself—the value of supporting another person.

Another practical example is stewardship. At St. Scholastica, we expect learners to take care of classrooms, desks, books, toilets, boarding facilities and the compound. When a learner is reminded not to waste water or damage school property, we are not simply protecting school resources. We are helping that learner understand that whatever has been entrusted to us must be used responsibly.

I also think our boarding programme provides a good opportunity to live Benedictine values. Learners have to share spaces, observe routines, respect one another and learn to live away from home. They are expected to take responsibility for their personal belongings and to consider the needs of others. In such an environment, values like patience, respect, self-discipline and community are not just taught—they are experienced.

Our teachers also have a responsibility to model what we teach. A learner will notice when a teacher is punctual, fair, patient and respectful. They will also notice when a teacher listens to them when they have a problem. Therefore, if we talk about respect but humiliate learners, or talk about responsibility but fail to take responsibility ourselves, the lesson is lost.

For me, one of the strongest Benedictine lessons is that discipline should be formative. When a learner makes a mistake, our responsibility is not simply to punish. We should help the learner understand what went wrong, take responsibility and make a better choice. This is particularly important for adolescents who are still developing their character.

We also have to prepare our learners for the digital world. We cannot tell them simply to avoid technology because technology is already part of their lives. Instead, we should teach them to use it responsibly. With artificial intelligence, for instance, learners need to understand that having an answer is not the same as understanding something. They still need to think, question, verify information and do their own work. In this way, Benedictine values such as truthfulness, responsibility and moderation become relevant even in the use of technology.

The value of service is also important. Whenever learners participate in activities that involve helping others, visiting or supporting people in need, or taking responsibility for the welfare of others within the school community, they begin to understand that education is not only for personal advancement. It should also prepare us to serve.

Therefore, I see St. Benedict and the Rule as giving our learners a moral compass. We cannot predict exactly what the world will look like when today's learners are adults. Some of the jobs they will do may not even exist today. But if we give them the ability to listen, think critically, work hard, pray, respect others, take responsibility and serve, they will be better prepared for whatever future they face.

For me, the real test of Benedictine education is what happens after the learner leaves the school gate. If a former learner becomes a successful professional but is dishonest, selfish or irresponsible, then we have only partly succeeded. But if that learner uses his or her knowledge responsibly, treats people with dignity, cares for what has been entrusted to them and is willing to serve others, then we can say that something of the spirit of St. Benedict has gone with them.

ESTEBAN (3)

When I think about the world we are preparing our students for, I sometimes feel that education itself has become an act of resistance—not against people, but against some of the things growing around us.

We live in a world that is fast, noisy, and constantly demanding our attention. There is little space to stop or listen, and sometimes we are expected to react before we have understood. So, when I ask what Saint Benedict and the Rule can offer a young person in 2026, I think they offer something we are slowly losing: the possibility of slowing down, listening before reacting, making space for another person, welcoming someone different, and understanding that we do not always have to win an argument or respond with disrespect when things do not go our way.

These are not old ideas. They are deeply necessary today. And this is why how we teach is as important as what we teach. We can talk about respect, empathy, peace, and community, but if students do not experience those things in their relationship with us, they remain just words.

We embody Benedictine values in the way we build relationships: in the time we take to listen, in the way we respond when students make mistakes, and in the way we correct them without humiliating them. Even when we disagree with their decisions, their dignity remains. This is where the Rule becomes alive in a school.

Our students will face disagreement, frustration, conflict, and many different ways of thinking and living. We cannot protect them from all of that, but we can help them discover another way of being in the world: one that does not require violence or disrespect, where listening is not weakness, empathy does not mean agreeing with everyone, and peace is something we actively build with others.

So perhaps what Saint Benedict and the Rule offer students in 2026 is not an escape from the world, but another way of living in it. Our responsibility is not only to teach that way of living, but to make it visible in the way we listen, welcome, correct, forgive, and build relationships.

Students may forget many things we teach, but I think they remember what it felt like to be seen, listened to, and treated with dignity. That experience can help them imagine—and eventually build—a different kind of world.

SISTER ANN MARY, OSB (3)

Education today has a much greater responsibility than simply imparting knowledge. As students face a rapidly changing, competitive and technology-driven world, education should equip them with knowledge, skills, values and the inner strength to face life with confidence. It helps them to think critically, to adapt changes, and make responsible decisions. At the same time, it helps the students to grow in compassion, respect, patience and an awareness of others.

We may have been transformed, now how is what, and how we teach, important in the context of the world into which we are sending the students? What do St. Benedict and the Rule offer to students in 2026? How do we embody that for our students?

One of the things I value most in Benedictine education is the importance given to the person. A student is not simply a learner who has to achieve good marks. Each student comes with a story, a family, gifts, struggles, dreams and possibilities. Our task as teachers is to recognise that person and accompany them. Young people live in a world of rapid technological change, social media, competition, individualism and uncertainty. They have access to enormous amounts of information, but they still need wisdom. They need people who will listen to them, accompany them and help them to distinguish what is truly valuable from what is merely attractive or popular.

From my experience in a Benedictine educational community, I realised that education helps the students to discover their unique talents and channels them in the right direction. In our school we provide a platform to showcase their talents and abilities through competitions and common avenues for performing creative arts, intellectual and STEM course, (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).It’s true that if we understand and accompany the students with patience and love, we can discover wonderful personalities and possibilities within them.

Therefore, Education is a two-way journey in which both the teacher and the student learn from one another, inculcating strong values and character within themselves. It trains to develop the whole personality through core skills and learns how to enhance human relationships.

Above all, education prepares young people not merely to succeed in the world, but to contribute meaningfully to it. Education forms persons who are competent, compassionate, responsible and ready to serve. In this sense, Benedictine education, with its emphasis on prayer, work, community, hospitality, balance and respect for each person, offers students a foundation for living a purposeful and meaningful life in today’s world.

PAT Part Four is our wildcard. I asked the teachers to consider topics we had not covered. Was there an aspect to Benedictine education that they wanted to include in their presentation for the larger Benedictine community?

PART FOUR

GEOFFREY (4)

At St. Scholastica Catholic School, the Rule of St. Benedict is lived more through our daily practices than through formal teaching. Prayer, work, discipline, service, hospitality and stewardship are part of our school routine. Ora et Labora is reflected in how we balance prayer, learning and responsibility.

For example, learners are expected to care for the school environment, respect others, share responsibilities and support those in need. In our boarding community, they learn to live with others, respect routines and appreciate that their actions affect the wider community.

Our Kenyan culture also influences how we interpret Benedictine values. Community, hospitality, respect for others and mutual support are deeply rooted in African culture and fit naturally with Benedictine community life.

One aspect I would add is the importance of example. As teachers and leaders, we cannot teach values effectively if we do not live them. Learners observe how we speak, correct, listen, lead and treat others.

Ultimately, Benedictine education is not only about producing academically successful learners. It is about forming responsible, compassionate, disciplined and service-oriented human beings who can go into the world with an inner compass. That, for me, is the continuing relevance of St. Benedict and the Rule in 2026.

ESTEBAN (4)

I think one of the things a Benedictine school offers, and something that is very strong in my school, is hospitality. In Spanish, we use the word “acogida,” and I think it means more than simply being welcoming.

At Benedictino de Santa María in Envigado, we try to make hospitality something that is felt from the moment you arrive. It is present in the way we speak to people, receive families, treat students, and work with one another. When you arrive, hopefully you feel joy, respect, companionship, and that you are welcome. That is powerful in a world where people can sometimes feel invisible.

We also have a saying in our school: we enroll families, not students. I like this idea because it reflects the kind of education we believe in. When a student comes to our school, we want to know the family and build a relationship with them, because education is something we do together. Our purpose is not simply academic success; it is also to help transform society.

For that, we need to educate human beings before anything else. Sometimes I say, half-jokingly, that in our school humanity is more important than mathematics. Of course mathematics, science, languages, and history matter. But none of them should be more important than the person who is learning them. Benedictine education reminds us to put the

human being at the centre.

We also try to offer something increasingly difficult to find: a pause. Our students live in a world of immediacy, constantly receiving information, messages, opinions, and demands for their attention. So we create spaces where they can stop, listen, and have a real conversation—where they can look at another person instead of a screen. Sometimes that is as simple as sitting with a student and being present. Those small things matter.

We also want to offer leadership, not as being better than others, but as having the courage to think, make decisions, take responsibility, and sometimes choose a different path. The world often invites young people to follow trends and opinions. We want them to stop and ask: “Is this really what I believe? Is this the person I want to become? What can I do to make things better?”

So, if you ask what a Benedictine school offers differently, I would not say that we have subjects or programs nobody else has. The difference is in the way we put things together: hospitality is lived, relationships matter, there is room for silence and listening, the human being comes before the academic result, and students are encouraged not just to adapt to the world, but to help transform it.

And one concrete way we do this is through what we call the “Circles of the Word.” Every week, students have two circles with their homeroom teachers, one on Monday and one on Friday. We sit together and create a space where everyone has the possibility to speak, but also, perhaps more importantly, to listen.

There is something I really like about this practice: you may speak once, but you can listen twenty-five times. Each student has a story, an opinion, a concern, or something to share. Listening to twenty-five different voices reminds us that our way of seeing the world is not the only one. For me, that is deeply connected to the Benedictine spirit.

The circle is not a class about empathy; it is an opportunity to practice empathy. It is not a lesson about listening; it is an experience of listening. And listening does not mean that I have to agree with you. It means I am willing to give you my attention and try to understand where you are coming from.

Sometimes the circles help us deal with a difficulty or conflict, but they are not only for moments when something goes wrong. They are part of regular school life because we believe community has to be built before there is a problem. We do not wait for a crisis to listen to one another; we make listening part of everyday life.

Sometimes there is no big problem to solve. A student may simply discover something about a classmate that they did not know, someone who is usually quiet may find a space to speak, or another student may realize that someone they thought they knew has a very different story. That is also education. That is also community.

And perhaps that is what we mean when we talk about bringing Benedictine values to life. We are not only telling students that listening, empathy, respect, hospitality, and peace are important. We are creating spaces where they can actually experience them.

A Benedictine school can be a place where you are seen, welcomed, and given the space to be human—and where, together with others, you learn how to make the world a little more human and a little more just.

SISTER ANN MARY, OSB (4)

When I look at the years ahead, I feel that one of our biggest challenges as educators is helping our students to remain human in a world that is changing very quickly. Technology, AI, social media and competition are becoming part of their daily life. We cannot take technology away from them, nor should we fear it. Rather, we need to teach them how to use it wisely and how to make good choices to understand what is right, what is valuable and what really matters in life while maintaining time for relationships, reflection, prayer, work and rest.

The years ahead will bring challenges like Changing values and pressures, Mental and emotional challenges and Diversity among students and preparing the students for an uncertain future, where many of the careers they are prepared for may not even exist then. Above all, the great task is to form them as good human beings rather than merely successful professionals and prepare them to contribute to the world.

Another challenge is that every child is different, and we need to understand their individual interests, talents and struggles for we cannot expect all the students to learn or grow in the same pace. As I have expressed earlier, I have personally experienced that when I took time to listen to the students and understand them, I often could discover something beautiful in them that is not visible at first instance. As educators, it is our prime duty to accompany the students and touch their lives because the influence of a teacher is much greater than we realise.

There is also a growing pressure on young people to succeed. Grades in the examination, careers and competition are important, but I believe education has to go beyond these things. Education is the development of the overall personality of each child. Through education our goal is to help the young people to become good, responsible and compassionate human beings who can face life with confidence.

We need to ask ourselves: Are we helping our students to become responsible, compassionate and happy human beings? Are we preparing them to live with others and to face difficulties with courage?

2. How do we see the Rule and Benedictine education providing a road map for our students? The Rule of St. Benedict gives us a very simple but meaningful road map. The word that speaks most is “Listen.” In our busy world, genuine listening has become difficult. Benedict teaches us to listen with the ear of the heart. Our students need to learn to listen—to God, to themselves and to others. Along with listening, the Rule also teaches us respect, humility, hospitality,

responsibility and balance, harmony. I feel these values are desperately needed by young people of today for equilibrium of life. For example, the community life teaches that we do not live only for ourselves rather we need to learn to co-operate, to be humble, to appreciate differences, to help one another and to take responsibility for the community.

Technology will change. Careers will change. Society will change. But values such as listening, respect, compassion, humility, responsibility and service will always remain relevant. And that is why I see the Rule of St. Benedict as a timeless road map. It helps us to form not merely knowledgeable students, but as whole persons—young people who can think wisely, live responsibly, relate lovingly and make a positive difference wherever they are.

The Rule of St. Benedict and Benedictine education give us a timeless direction- to form not just successful students, but young people who are wise, compassionate, responsible, resilient and rooted in values, capable of bringing goodness and hope to an ever-changing world and ready to contribute to the society.

NATALIE (4)

One of the ways we have sought to bring the Benedictine ethos to life at Lourdes Hill College is through our Compass Card initiative. Inspired by the timeless wisdom of the Rule of St Benedict and the Gospel message exemplified through the story of the Good Samaritan, the initiative provides students with opportunities to actively live out the values that underpin our community.

The Compass Card is inspired by the image of a compass—an instrument that provides clarity and direction. At Lourdes Hill College, our Benedictine values serve a similar purpose, guiding our students as they navigate the choices and challenges of everyday life. The Compass Card encourages students to recognise that living our values is not simply about meeting expectations, but about making thoughtful and purposeful choices and looking for opportunities to go above and beyond in the way they treat others, and contribute to our community.

Each Middle School student is given a card with ten spaces, which is kept in the plastic sleeve of their college diary. When a student demonstrates an action or behaviour that reflects our Benedictine values, a staff member signs one of the spaces on their card. In this way, the card becomes a tangible reminder that our values can provide a moral compass, helping students to choose the right path even when no one is watching.

The initiative is grounded in the values of respect, compassion, hospitality, service and care for others. A student might receive a signature for welcoming someone who is feeling left out, showing kindness to another student, helping someone without being asked, demonstrating compassion, acting with integrity, quietly leading by example, or contributing positively to the wider College community. These actions have the power to strengthen our community and make a significant difference to others.

Importantly, the focus of the initiative is not simply on the reward itself. It is about forming young women of character who understand that their choices and actions have an impact on those

around them. The Rule of St Benedict calls us to listen with the ear of our heart, to welcome others, to serve one another and to recognise the dignity of each person.

The Compass Card provides a practical way for our students to put these principles into action in their everyday lives. The Compass Card also encourages reflection and purpose. We want our students to develop an understanding that doing the right thing is not about perfection, nor is it always about receiving recognition. Rather, it is about developing the confidence to follow their inner moral compass—to make good choices, to act with integrity and to help others find their way. Through the initiative, students are encouraged to recognise that their character is shaped through the small decisions they make each day.

When a student completes their card, it is submitted through their Homeroom teacher and placed into a draw. Students have the opportunity to receive small rewards, while completed cards also provide an opportunity for us to acknowledge their achievement with their families through a positive pastoral email. At the end of each term, students are also included in a larger draw. While these rewards provide encouragement and excitement, the deeper purpose is the recognition of the values being lived.

Through this project, we are deliberately shifting the focus from simply recognising what students achieve to recognising who they are becoming. We want our students to understand that kindness, generosity, compassion, service, respect and integrity are not occasional acts, but qualities that shape the person they choose to be and ultimately shape our community.

In this way, the Compass Card is one small but meaningful example of how we are seeking to make the Benedictine tradition tangible for our students. It allows the Rule of St Benedict to move from the pages of a text into the everyday experiences of our young people. Like a compass, our Benedictine values provide direction and purpose, encouraging our students to see a need, respond with compassion, choose the right path and, in turn, help others to find their way. It is through these small acts, repeated each day, that we hope our students come to understand what it truly means to live the Benedictine way.

PAT This is the conclusion of our presentation. We would now like to offer an opportunity for you to ask questions of the panelists, or to share observations about their reflections.