

# Sister Mary Clare, OSB, elected prioress of Holy Angels

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Sister Mary Clare Bezner was elected prioress of the Olivetan Benedictine Sisters of Holy Angels Convent in Jonesboro Jan. 22 and will now be called Mother Mary Clare.

Msgr. Scott Friend, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church in Jonesboro, served as Bishop Anthony B. Taylor's delegate and presided at the election.

"It's very, very humbling to think that my sisters have that kind of trust in me, that they think that I have those gifts and talents that are needed at this moment for this house at this time," Mother Mary Clare said. "And then it's a little bit frightening because it's so new and a lot of responsibility. I have to bear the weight of my decisions, and I'll have the answer for that someday."

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Before the election, she was minister for religious, the bishop's liaison with the religious communities in the state, and her community's vocations director.

In her new role, Mother Mary Clare will serve as the "manager" of the convent. She will be responsible for the spiritual and physical needs of its 28 members and the needs of their ministries.

"We do believe that God gives each prioress the grace that she needs in her role," she said.

"It's not a one-person show. I have a council and community that are always trying to help me. We're working together."

When sisters at the convent reach 35 years old, they are put into consideration to be elected prioress. There is no campaigning or presentation of platforms.

"Everybody goes on the list, so you have to be prepared for that possibility," she said. "It's more of a family situation where we come together and pray. We don't even talk about it. We all individually pray. And then, through that process of prayer, put up who we think would be right and through a process of elimination come to a consensus."

While those elected can decline the office, Mother Mary Clare said she felt the Holy Spirit guided her to accept it.

"It's kind of a calling within a calling and it's spoken to me through others," she said.

Mother Mary Clare, 45, grew up Catholic but didn't think a religious life was her calling.

"When I was a teenager, I really did the opposite of what my mom wanted ... I didn't have thoughts of being a religious when I was young. As a matter of fact, I thought they were kind of weird," she told Arkansas Catholic in a 2017 interview.

At 18, she joined the U.S. Air Force, serving as an emergency medical technician stationed at Offutt Air Force Base in Nebraska.

"I really feel like my time in the military was well used by God, but that was probably me not hearing his voice very clearly," she said. "It was a very 18-year-old decision. I decided the military would be the way to get my education and to see the world. I was very naive, young. Nobody talked to me about how to discern what you do with your future when I was a kid."

After her discharge in 1997, she went to nursing school to become a labor and delivery nurse, but the call to serve came in a greater way. She served as a missionary for a year in Honduras where she met sisters who were "young and happy and joyful."

"I realized that there was something to look at that I'd never seen before growing up. I didn't have the image that a religious life was something young people can do."

In 2011, the Lindsay, Texas, native professed final vows as an Olivetan Benedictine sister.

Since 2018, she has been a founding member of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, which advises Bishop Taylor on diocesan matters.

Mother Mary Clare replaces Mother Laura Cathcart, who became prioress in 2020.

The convent operates St. Bernards Medical Center in Jonesboro and also focuses on education, Hispanic ministry, prison ministry and other apostolates.

The new prioress said she is looking forward to the opportunity to serve her community in her new role.

"We're a family, and I love them very much," she said. "I want to share with them that gift that God has given to me. My mission is to try to bring the love of a mother to the situation."