

# How Sweet It Is

## Member Spotlight: Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey

Perched high on a bluff overlooking the Mississippi river sits an unassuming, non-descript building; but looks can be deceiving. You see, the building houses a candy factory that makes the most mouth-watering creamy caramels this side, that side, or any side, of the Mississippi river. They can only be described as heavenly. These Trappistine Creamy Caramels are produced by the sisters of Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey.

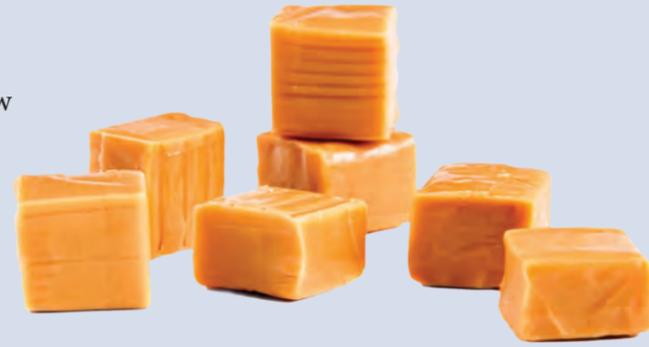
Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey was founded in 1964 when 13 nuns from the Mt. St. Mary's Abbey in Wrentham, Massachusetts journeyed to Iowa to form a new monastery. Currently, the Abbey, located just outside of Dubuque, is home to 17 nuns of the Roman Catholic Order of Cistercians of

the Strict Observance, meaning they follow the Rule of St. Benedict.

Sister Gail Fitzpatrick (left) and Karen Cusack work at cutting the caramels and preparing them for coating.

Commonly known as Trappistines, they follow the seventeenth century reform of the La Trappe Abbey in France.

One of the most common perceptions about the Rule of St. Benedict and monastic life in general, is the observance of total silence. While the sisters no longer observe complete silence, it is still a large and important part of life at Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey. "Silence is a value in monastic life," explains Sr. Gail Fitzpatrick, one of the founding sisters and the second abbess of the Abbey, "we live it today as well and authentically as we can."



Speaking is not forbidden but is kept to a minimum and limited to brief, cordial encounters and conversations, allowing the sisters the opportunity for constant prayer and contemplation.

*“Silence is a value in monastic life...”*

According to Sr. Gail, "prayer becomes the fabric of our life." Indeed, prayer is woven throughout their day, the sisters pray seven times each day starting at 3:45 am and ending at 7:15 pm (see A Day in the Life on the next page.) All daily liturgies are open to the public.

Each abbey, while interdependent, is self-governing and self-supporting, electing their own abbess, forming new members and determining how they are to support themselves.

High on a bluff, overlooking the Mississippi Valley sits Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey.



The Trappistine Creamy Caramels factory.



The church altar at Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey.



A monastery is not allowed to become dependant on the charity of others and must be able to earn a living without making a profit.

Which brings us back to the caramels. Initially, the sisters began to support themselves and the new monastery by making wreaths and then cookies. Unfortunately, the cookies required special packaging and the Abbey was not equipped to handle those requirements. They then turned to their founding house in Wrentham where the sisters there had been making candy using an age old recipe donated by a Greek candy maker. A year later, candy production was started at the Abbey. Today, the sisters are still using the same recipe which includes fresh cream and butter; however, the remainder of the recipe Sr. Gail vows, "will stay a secret."

Trappistine Creamy Caramels is the Abbey's primary source of income and 90% of their annual sales are made in the last four months of each year. Aside from a small gift shop on the property, the caramels can only be purchased online at [trappistine.com](http://trappistine.com).

The quiet, serene atmosphere of Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey combined with the scenic beauty and deliciously creamy caramels leave any visitor to contemplate how sweet it is!

### A Day in the Life A typical day in the life of the Sisters

3:30 am	Rise and shine
3:45 am	Vigils prayer service
4:30 am	Breakfast and personal time for reading or studying
7:00 am	Lauds prayer service
8:30-11:30 am	Time for work
9:45 am	Tierce prayer service (prayed at work)
Noon	Midday prayer service
12:20 pm	Dinner is served (main meal of the day)
1:20 pm	Rest, contemplation
2:00-4:00 pm	Back to work (some days this time is allotted for study or restorative activities)
5:00 pm	Vespers prayer service (followed by a small supper)
7:00 pm	Compline prayer service
7:30 pm	Time for reading or off to bed
8:30 pm	Good night