



SUMMER 2002

ST. GERTRUDE'S Canticle

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE

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A Pioneering Life

by Sr. Esther Velasquez

The word 'pioneering' reminds me of taking a journey, moving from one place to another. Usually the destination is unknown and the trip full of perils. A pioneer is also one who starts something new and experiences something for the first time.

I come from pioneers of a sort. My Hispanic father was born in America in a settlement started by conquistadors. He grew up in his tight-knit family following field work through Colorado, Utah and Idaho. My Anglo mother was born in Mexico, a child of Mormon settlers. When mom was a baby, Pancho Villa, the revolutionary, sent all the 'gringos' back to the States. Mom and her family left Mexico and eventually settled in Idaho.

My parents' mixed race marriage was a pioneering experience, too. Our extended family settled on farms located between Gooding and Shoshone, Idaho, the location of my first memories. We lost our farm when I was in the first grade because of hail, and in order to survive, we became migrant farm workers.

I was born a pioneer just by being a child of migrant laborers. I became a pioneer in my own right when I entered a Swiss/German convent in north Idaho in 1965.

I joined St. Gertrude's after a deep religious experience. I had no doubt God was calling me to religious life, but I wanted to remain in Idaho. St. Gertrude's already had two Hispanic sisters, Elisa

Martinez and Barbara Gonzales, and I became the first Anglo-Hispanic member. In spite of the great cultural adjustments, I felt 'at home' in a matter of months. I committed myself to being the best nun possible, the "perfect sister."



Sr. Esther Velasquez

Back in the '60s members were either teachers, nurses or domestics, and so I was trained to be a teacher, even though I had never felt the calling to that profession. For nine years I was directed by my superior to teach school. I loved the children, but did not enjoy the teaching. I found the work mentally and physically draining.

In the Catholic church Vatican II resulted in much pioneering activity, too. Sisters began to be consulted about the type of work and ministry each felt best able to accomplish. I asked to work in the area of healing, pioneering this new ministry as a medical secretary at our hospital in Jerome and then as pastoral assistant in St. Anthony's Parish in Pocatello. Praying with people for healing was one of the many services I provided to people in need. I loved this work, and I poured my whole heart and soul into it. Unfortunately, my desire to serve was great but my physical and mental strength were not. I tried to do too much, too perfectly.

In 1985, after suffering a total physical and emotional breakdown, I was diagnosed as having clini-

See "Pioneer" on page 4



Greetings from the Prioress

Dear Friends and Family,

During the “high liturgical season” of the past months, we’ve walked with Jesus through his passion, death and resurrection. We’ve watched with his disciples as he ascended to take his place as Son in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit in that dynamic relationship we name the Holy Trinity. We’ve waited with the disciples for the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, promised by Jesus; the Spirit who would transform us, remind us of all that Jesus did and taught, and give us the courage to go out and be the transforming presence of Jesus in our world.

With all that is going on in our world and in our Church, it’s hard to recognize that transforming presence of Jesus today. Maybe we need a new Pentecost, a new breath of the Holy Spirit’s transforming power, one which would enable us to recognize the truth and bring about healing, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation in our world, our Church and our families.

In these difficult times I believe that God is asking us to be *tenacious*, defined by Webster as “not easily pulled apart; sticking to; strong.” God is asking us to hold fast to our faith and to our dream for a just and peaceful world.

Our family and faith ancestors were tenacious in their praying and waiting until it was time to make their dreams come alive, to pioneer new paths despite all odds and against all opposition.

Our pioneering sisters from Sarnen, Switzerland, dreamed of establishing a new Benedictine monastery. They struggled through hard times, inner and outer conflicts, and difficulties, continually and faithfully making adjustments to their dream in order to make it real. They held tenaciously to their faith and pioneered a future that we live today.

We are also pioneering a new future for those who follow us. In our praying and waiting we are looking at our aging buildings, our current ministries and membership.

God has blessed us with a vibrant retreat ministry which we desire to develop and grow. We feel God is calling us to share our spirituality, our environment and our museum. We strive to balance these public activities with our private, monastic ones. As Benedictines we are called to be contemplative and we need quiet in our living spaces to nurture the gift of contemplation so it can be shared with those who come.

We are asking questions such as, Can we reorganize our monastery – built in 1920 for that era’s activities – to provide for our current work and ministries? what will we need in 2020? should we build something new? an addition? a multipurpose building? Imagine the differences of opinion among this community of 69 women!

As responsible stewards of the gift of this monastery building, as well as in discernment of God’s will for our future, we have invited an architectural firm to perform a professional assessment of all our buildings and provide us possibilities on how our space could be reshaped. This will give us needed information to make decisions on how we move into the future.

Is God asking us to take some risks for the sake of our vision and mission? What kind of pioneering is God asking of us? Can we afford to be tenacious in holding on to our dreams? Pray for us!

Blessings and peace to you!

Sr. Jean Lalande, Prioress

My Tenacious Vocation

by Sr. Aelred Oakley

I believe my vocation to the religious life began at the age of eight. My family was not Catholic, an exception in a locality in London settled by Irish emigrants. But I knew nothing of the faith until a little neighbor girl invited me to go to the Benediction one Sunday evening.

I was entranced by the beautiful little church sandwiched between two factories, the service, the almost palpable devotion and faith of the people. I thought I was in heaven as they sang their simple old hymns and worshipped their loving God. Thereafter, I went to Mass every Sunday.



Sr. Aelred Oakley

Our nearest school just happened to be Catholic as well. We received religious instruction daily and I lapped it up. Both my brother and I won medals for religious knowledge, to the surprise of the examining priest. In his rich Irish brogue, he said "Why not, indaid, they've got the fa-a-a-th." The principal of our school suggested to my mother that we be baptized, and so we were. I was 12 years old.

Once I finished school I joined the Legion of Mary, doing census work in the parish. At the Cathedral I picked up a pamphlet in the vestibule on vocations. One requirement for becoming a nun clearly stated that one need to be from "a good Catholic family." Of course my family did not qualify, so I put my innate leanings toward religious life on the back burner.

In 1949 I joined my sister in Vancouver, BC, where I heard of the Cenacle Convent. I joined the Businesswomen's group there. My dear little companion sister used to hint that I had a vocation, but life's events pre-

vented me thinking of such a thing for a very long time ... about 20 years!

Finally, I knew I should do something about this nagging thought that I should become a nun. I told the priest at my next retreat of my innate desires. He "just happened" to be giving a retreat at St. Gertrude's in Idaho later on and invited me to visit there. I did and was enchanted with the peace, beauty and evident holiness of the place. Before I left I asked Mother Augustine Uhlenkott for permission to enter. Much to my surprise, she accepted me. I was 45!

Life as a Benedictine these last 37 years has been challenging and fulfilling. It was wonderful that the community could use my secretarial experience in the College library, for the Academy office, as secretary to Mother Regina O'Connell, and in the parishes of Sacred Heart in Boise and Saints Peter and Paul in Grangeville.

Later on I held brief stints as a home helper to the elderly and even baby-sitting. Now I do a little clerical work, cleaning and help out in the old kitchen, especially at harvest times. Especially challenging at this point in my life is learning the computer so that I can help out in the Archives. I'll have to get St. Joseph (the worker) on the job!

Over the years I've had much growing to do – helped by the grace of God and the love and patience of my community. I am very, very grateful. There never has been any doubt in me that this is where God wanted me to be. I am thankful for God's tenacity – in sticking with me while my vocation unfolded. Praise Him! I hope I can respond fully to His great love.

Vocations News

Our vocation ministry continues to move forward. We have had several women make initial visits to begin the exploration of their vocation with us.

We now have three affiliates. One has moved into the monastery as a volunteer for the summer to continue her discernment. Another woman plans to come in August. Please pray for both of these women as they continue discerning their vocations.

Throughout the summer I'll be busy attending day camps and Vacation Bible school. During July I will represent the the monastery at the Chapter meeting of the Federation of St. Gertrude.

In April I attended the 3rd Continental Congress on Vocations in Montreal. The 1,135 delegates included bishops, priests, brothers, sisters, Knights of Columbus, Serrans, campus ministers, youth ministers, parents and young adults. It was a lively and diverse group, and I realized that there are many people concerned about the future of priesthood and consecrated life.

The theme for the Congress was *Vocacion: Don de Dieu, Given for God's People*. This theme was expressed over and over again and indicates that VOCATION is a gift from God, given by God for God's people.

Even as we face such a critical time in the church, the speakers addressed the current situation very honestly, and recognized the need to move forward. The Rev. Ronald Rolheiser said we need saints, "those who show a credible sign of the presence of God in the world, those who give their lives over to God and call others to do the same."

In Loving Memory



Sister Alexia Kaschmitter, 85, died at the monastery on May 2, 2002.

She was born Rosa Maria, the third of ten children, on

January 19, 1917, to Joseph and Anna Weber Kaschmitter of Denver, ID.

Sr. Alexia entered the monastery in Cottonwood in 1931 where she made her Profession as a Benedictine sister in 1933. She taught school for 30 years in Nezperce, Genesee, Cottonwood, Greencreek, Nampa,

Grangeville, Pocatello, and Boise, ID; Colton and Pomeroy, WA; and Waunakee, WI.

Sr. Alexia loved teaching and was respected by her students. She particularly enjoyed preparing school children for their First Holy Communion.

After retiring from teaching in 1965, Sr. Alexia served as a housekeeper at the monastery. She also helped keep house for her aging mother. She continued to do housekeeping for her brother, Richard, until 1996, when she fully retired.

Sr. Alexia is remembered for her devotion and dedication, her faithfulness to duty, her deep attachment to and love for her family, and her childlike enjoyment of nature's beauty.

We Want You!

Are you looking for something to do this summer? How about being a volunteer at the monastery?

Opportunities exist for a variety of work in the gardens, kitchens, forest, infirmary and at the museum.

Schedules can be very flexible for those who have time limitations.

Live-in volunteer opportunities are available, too. As a live-in you receive your room and board, training, spiritual direction, and retreat opportunities. You must be at least 21 years old, in good health, and able to meet your own financial and medical needs while here.

For info or applications, contact Sr. Emagene Warren at 208-962-3224 or ewarren2@hotmail.com.

Pioneer, from Page 1

cal depression. Again, I found myself a pioneer, this time unwillingly, as I began working on being healed while, at the same time, dealing with the stigma society and my religious community members placed on people diagnosed with depression.

After three years of gradually building up my strength, I was asked to join our missionary sisters in Bogota, Colombia, teaching English as a Second Language on a part-time basis. They needed help and I needed an infusion of self-esteem. After consulting with my doctors, I went.

I will be forever grateful for what I learned while living those years in South America. When my health began to deteriorate again I returned to St. Gertrude's. Once there, I felt myself slide into the deepest depression of my life.

The depression so disabled my ability to function that I asked God to let me die. But God had another plan so I entered a treatment program and began to learn how to live!

In treatment I was challenged to leave religious life because coping with the unhealthy behaviors that sometimes occur in the system almost insured another breakdown. But I was so certain that God had called me to religious life that I felt like Peter who said, "Lord, to whom shall I go? You have the words of everlasting life!"

Although Benedict set up his Rule for those who live a communal life, I was allowed to live alone so that I could grow in healing and learn how to live with my disability.

I lived in Caldwell, Idaho, and worked as a bilingual aide in the public schools. I also helped out in the First Communion program in the local parish. I continued to receive mental therapy there and grew in my understanding of how to stay in recovery from depression by attending 12-step support groups. After seven years I again felt God's nudge to try to live in community. I took the risk and moved home, becoming administrative secretary for our prioress and her staff, my present position.

Every day I feel affirmed in my religious vocation and decision to return to St. Gertrude's. My health has improved and I feel better than I have in many years. By living monastic life more fully I feel that I have finally found the life to which God called me 37 years ago: a life of prayer, quiet, work and leisure, as St. Benedict prescribed.

While I didn't willingly choose this unusual path to God through clinical depression, my community and I have pioneered in learning how to live with my disability. Only God could have designed a lesson like that!

Now, as we plan for our future as the community of St. Gertrude's, we start a new era of pioneering. Because of my experience of God's guidance through difficult times, I look forward to whatever God has in store. I know our future will be a "school of the Lord's service," *Rule of Benedict*.

Working on the Faith Walk

There's a rich tradition in religious communities of partnering with people not called to be vowed religious. Within the Benedictine family they are known as Oblates. Oblates are men and women, married or single, active in any Christian denomination, who closely associate themselves with the monastery through an initiation process and formal *oblation* (promise).

At St. Gertrude's we are blessed to have 42 oblates and 12 oblate candidates. Our oblates participate in the life of the monastery, volunteering where needed, serving on monastic committees and working with the retreat and vocation ministries. They meet regularly as a community in small geographic groups to deepen their prayer life and explore ways of living Benedictine values in their daily lives.

Here's what some have to say about being in the oblate program:

St. Benedict's challenge to seek God, the Extraordinary, in my ordinary life draws me to become an oblate at St. Gertrude's. Benedictine spirituality is like a magnet pulling me forward to find out not who I am, but how I am.

Friede Gabbert, Candidate

I was drawn to the Oblates as a continuation of my spiritual growth, and it seemed to be the next logical step for guidance. Most of all it felt right in my heart to improve my awareness and relationship with God through the Benedictine way of life.

I am currently a candidate and feel that my journey of learning how to become an Oblate is a beginning but will never end. I'm excited and peacefully content with how God is working in my life. The more I pray, the more I am aware of God's love for all of us and how I can bring that love to others. I have the help and support of the Oblate community and the community of St. Gertrude's, both of whom serve as guides in my spiritual journey.

Lori Hopkins

Being an Oblate means having an awareness of God's presence in my life that goes beyond our inspiring get-togethers and my daily prayer but has become a part of me in my "ordinary" day.

Linda Stubbers

Our desire in seeking oblate status is basically to know Jesus better. Studying Benedictine writings and participating in humanitarian and pacifistic projects seem to be available at St. Gertrude's monastery to accomplish these ends. Knowing the faithful at St. Gertrude's would be a delightful extra benefit. This seems a logical step after 14 years attending retreats at Cottonwood.

Alice & Clarence McIntyre

Through the Oblate Program at St. Gertrude's, I have been given the opportunity to respond to St. Benedict's call to listen to God's voice.

Marilyn Summers, Inquirer

Becoming a Candidate was the joyful beginning of a journey to allow God to make firm in my heart the work of His hands. Being a Candidate means being faithful to that seeking, so that I might build strength in the practices of hospitality, simplicity, and peacemaking. I long for this fruit of spiritual strength promised by St. Benedict, which will enable me to meet with greater discernment and courage the challenges of being a Christian, in the world and in community.

Elizabeth Tomlinson



The Oblates of St. Gertrude, or many of them, anyway!

Being an Oblate in the Monastery of St. Gertrude has been such an enriching experience for me these past five years. It is fulfilling a deep desire to answer the call to come closer to a lived holiness with a dedicated group of people. It is a privilege to share in the prayer life and liturgies of the sisters.

There is always so much more to learn, to experience and to enjoy. One of the great joys for me is to be able to actually move in and live among the sisters for a time, to have my own room, to be able to go to the dining room for coffee or snack and to use the libraries. There is a freedom to stroll over the beautiful grounds, to receive spiritual direction, to visit and play.

The long history of dedication, hard work and commitment reveals the mystery of God's active presence engaging His people. I am happy to be a small part of all of it.

Joan Hagedorn



DEVELOPMENTS

by Sr. Mary Kay Henry, Director of Development

The last issue of *The Canticle* told about our putting down roots in the Northwest in 1882. We have invited all the descendants of John H. and Gertrude Uhling Uhlenkott to mark this 120th anniversary with us on July 21, 2002 with an afternoon of thanksgiving, storytelling, and feasting.

John and Gertrude themselves were Benedictine Oblates and three of their thirteen children became Benedictine Sisters. Sister Engelberta remained at St. Benedict's in Minnesota. Sister Augustine entered at Uniontown, WA, and Sister Scholastica entered at Colton, WA, both eventually moving to St. Gertrude's in Cottonwood.

It was John and Gertrude who encouraged the community to come to Cottonwood to educate the area's youth. They gave us the land where the monastery is located and we bought additional land from them in 1906.

Their Benedictine roots bore fruit again in four granddaughters becoming members of St. Gertrude's – Sisters Engelberta (RIP), Augustine, Johanna (RIP) and Scholastica. The vitality continued with three great-granddaughters joining the community – Sisters Agnes Reichlin, Judith Uhlenkott (RIP) and Emagene Uhlenkott Warren.

Our first Sr. Scholastica and second Sr. Augustine served as Prioresses of the community – Mother Scholastica during the building of the current monastery and Mother Augustine during the initial years of the Vatican II call for transformation. At the age of 98 Sr. Augustine is the oldest living descendant of John and Gertrude.

Where might this legacy lead as we pioneer the beginning of the third millennium?

Online Giving

If you are interested in making your donations online, now you can! Online donations are collected through Network for Good, an organization which passes 100% of your contribution to us. If you are interested, visit www.StGertrudes.org and click on the Donate Now button!

Check the Connection

It was fun to receive your responses to our invite to flood us with stories of fun, serious and inspirational incidents about your connections with the monastery and the sisters. Your stories are powerful, and the invitation remains open for *your* incident of connection! Look for them to be uploaded to our website over the next few months: www.StGertrudes.org.

Good Wine At the Last

As this newsletter goes to print we are struggling to meet our fundraising goals for this fiscal year ending June 30. Many of you made donations to us last fiscal year, and I invite each of you who haven't yet made a donation to us this year to make one now. Your gift would help us cross the finish line! Who is ready to share the good wine kept for the last?

The Forest Is Growing

Thanks to those of you who have responded generously to our Grow a Forest Campaign. Since May 1st your combined donations have provided another 20,000 trees for our reforestation efforts on Cottonwood Butte. We hope to raise funds to plant another 50,000 trees over the next several years.

Raspberry Festival

Sunday, August 4, 2002

10:00 am ~ 4:00 pm

Prairie High School Gym
& Monastery Grounds

Come celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Raspberry Festival with us!

This family-focused, fun-filled day features live music, cultural and hand-crafting demonstrations, raspberry shortcake, beef sandwiches, raspberry jam, a quilt show, show 'n shine, book sales, Chapel tours and more.

Two new events make their debut this year to mark the anniversary.

The first is the **Raspberry Run**, an out-and-back 10K run from the monastery to Keuterville, and the **Shortcake Walk**, a 5K walking route. Entrance fee for either is \$12 and includes a t-shirt. Starting time is 8:00 am, and showers will be available at the high school afterwards. For more information, contact the museum at 208-962-7123 or museum@velocitus.net.

The second new event is the **Raspberry Festival Arts & Crafts Fair**. Vendors of handmade arts and crafts are currently being invited to show and sell their wares. This event will take place on the monastery lawns, rain or shine. If you are an art or craft vendor and are interested in reserving your space – \$30 for a 10' x 10' – please contact Darla at develop@camasnet.com or 208-962-3224x35.

Attendance each of the last several years has been 1,200 and more. People who attend the Raspberry Festival come from all around the United States and locally. This fundraising event is vital for the financial health of the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude as it generates a significant portion of the museum's operations budget.

Pioneering Vision, Tenacious Faith

Pioneering, tenacious and visionary Benedictine women from St. Gertrude's have been part of the history of the northwest for more than 120 years. Many wise women have passed into, out of and beyond St. Gertrude's in its long history, but when pioneering and tenacity are the subjects of a conversation, everyone starts talking about Sr. Alfreda Elsensohn.

Sr. Alfreda joined St. Gertrude's in 1915, grasping faithfully to her vocation, even against her own mother's wishes. By 1917, she was teaching at St. Joseph's School in Cottonwood, spending her summers in the classroom herself, earning her B.S. degree from Gonzaga University in 1927, and her M.S. from the University of Idaho in 1939. A brilliant student, she worked tirelessly on her education and was one of the first sisters in the community to earn college degrees.

When the Colton, WA, academy closed in 1931, Sr. Alfreda packed up and moved the science lab to St. Gertrude's. Many of the items were biology, geology and taxidermy samples that teachers used in their classes. Sr. Alfreda felt the collections needed adequate space to be exhibited. She asked if she could make the collection accessible and visible, and was given space in the attic of the old wooden convent building, then being used as St. Gertrude's Academy.

Sr. Alfreda used to say that the current Historical Museum at St. Gertrude got its start in the science classroom as she taught decades of students in botany, biology, typing, journalism and more. Many items in the early collection were class projects and artifacts donated by her students.

In 1954 the new Academy building was ready to be occupied. The bulging collection was moved from the attic in the old building to the basement in the new.

During these same years, as if she didn't have enough to do, Sr. Alfreda collected historical information on many of the arti-

From the right: At the Idaho County Courthouse dedication, 1954; Sr. Alfreda in 1972; signing Vol. 2 of *Pioneer Days in Idaho County*; in the attic museum, c. 1930.



facts. This research piqued her naturally inquisitive mind and led her to wonder about the stories behind the fascinating items entrusted to her.

In the 1930's, Sr. Alfreda occasionally traveled around the region to document the stories of the early Camas Prairie pioneers. This was no small accomplishment given the norms of the day for proper nun behavior. On the occasions she was allowed to leave the monastery to do an interview, she traveled with others. For the most part, however, the material she gathered was via volumes of correspondence.

A pioneer of multi-tasking, Sr. Alfreda often had her typing students copy historical documents on loan to her. These copies she added to her collection before sending the originals back to the owners!

Guided once again by her inner vision and supported by her tenacious faith, Sr. Alfreda moved forward with publishing her research. This was a daring move as women weren't encouraged to publish research during those years. Also, and more importantly, some members of the monastic community opposed her work.

She went ahead and the results were a two-volume set, *Pioneer Days in Idaho County*, published in 1947 and 1951. This work has become the definitive history of Idaho County. The quality, depth and scope of research led Gov. C.A. Bottolfsen to appoint Sr. Alfreda to the Idaho Council of American Pioneer Trails Association.

Breaking more new ground, Sr. Alfreda was a charter member of the Idaho Association of Museums. She received the "Idaho Writer of the Year" award in 1969, and in 1970, received the Governor's Award for Arts and Humanities.

Always at odds with her time and place, Sr. Alfreda's faith in her vision of creating a bridge from the past to the future through historical research and preservation kept her moving forward, into the future.

"Her dreams were difficult to articulate," remembered then prioress Sr. Gertrude Wemhoff, "and emerged step-by-step instead of all at once."

"Often she was not understood, supported or encouraged in her endeavors. Her vision spurred her on amidst very severe obstacles."

Come Away to a Retreat

Seeking Wholeness: A Cancer Retreat

July 19 - 24, 2002

Sr. Carol Ann Wassmuth

A five-day retreat designed to provide a supportive, restful environment for people whose lives have been affected by cancer. Through prayer, sharing and enjoyment of nature, individuals can find the space they need to deal with the important questions of life's purpose and direction and to experience the healing presence of God.

Come To the Quiet

August 9 - 16, 2002

Sr. Lillian Englert & Staff

A silent individually directed retreat. Relax in God's presence, surrounded by natural beauty and supported by a praying community. There will be opportunities for optional faith sharing, creative expression through music, art, body prayer and ritual.

Discovering the Monk Within

August 24 - 30, 2002

Sr. Judith Brower

An "immersion experience" into everyday living in a monastery. Enter into the rhythm of prayer, work, leisure and study within the monastic community and the retreat group.

Faith After the Beginning

September 6 - 8, 2002

Sr. Meg Sass

Adult faith is meant to keep on growing and has seasons of dormancy, beginnings, growth and harvest, over and over again. Come explore and foster the growing edges of your own faith.

From Age-ing to Sage-ing

September 13 - 15, 2002

Sr. Barbara Jean Glodowski

A weekend to help you discover the true meaning of the life span development and to empower you to open yourself to God's grace.



Visit us on the web: www.StGertrudes.org

Email: retreat@camasnet.com

outreachretreats@hotmail.com



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Look Inside ...

A pioneering walk
with depression

God's patient and persistent
work in Sr. Aelred's vocation

Tenacious or stubborn ...
highlights of Sr. Alfreda's life



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