



SPRING 2003

ST. GERTRUDE'S **Canticle** A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE

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Spirituality & Retreat Ministry

31 Years of Serving the Church

by Sr. Lillian Englert

Although the Benedictine tradition of receiving guests and having occasional retreatants here at the Monastery of St. Gertrude existed before 1971, it was in December of that year that a proposal was brought to community to open a "Spiritual Renewal Center." After receiving the bishop's permission and informing the diocesan priests of our intentions, we opened the center on March 1, 1972.

The immediate goal of the center was to "provide within our active community an opportunity for a more contemplative form of life in order to meet the needs of individuals at certain periods of their spiritual growth ... to have a center for spiritual renewal for [those] who wish to come for shorter or longer periods of prayer and solitude."

Renewal activities that first year included directed retreats, marriage enrichment workshops, group retreats for adults and youth, a Methodist retreat, and hosted ICCW. Publicity included presentations at clergy and women's deanery meetings, advertisements in the *Idaho Register*, bulletin announcements, and sisters spreading the news.

One early announcement read, "The Spiritual Renewal Center at St. Gertrude's Convent, Cotton-

wood, ID, is a place to which YOU can go for prayer and solitude amidst the atmosphere of peace and beauty."



Over the subsequent years the focus remained on providing "contemplative space" for group and individual retreatants. Housing for retreatants moved from the monastery dorms to individual rooms and to the outside houses. Many groups, Protestant and Catholic, utilized our facilities for their weekend retreats, most often bringing their own presenters. Individual retreatants continued to come from

many different places for quiet and solitude.

In 1986 we launched the Inn-Spire Program that provided a three-month contemplative experience. This program ran every September through December until 1998. In those 12 years we served the church well by allowing many women and men to be renewed and transitioned back into ministry after this "time out" period with God.

In my 14 years of serving in retreat ministry, I have seen a steady increase in the number of retreatants. They come from around the world for experiences such as Inn-Spire, but also for individual retreats. Now they hear about us through the internet, but the best publicity still remains word of mouth. "To

See "Renewal" on page 2

In Loving Memory

Sister Regina (Kathleen Carey) O'Connell, 85, died January 15, 2003 at the Monastery. The first of three children, she was born to Louis and Ellen Carey O'Connell on May 2, 1917, in Republic, WA.

She joined St. Gertrude's in 1935 where she made her final Profession in 1937. She earned a B.A. in Education from Holy Names College in Spokane, WA, and an M.S. in Music Education from the University of Idaho.

Her wit, personal interest in each student, and dedication to quality education won Sr. Regina many life-long friends among her former students at St. Joseph's School in Genesee, St. Paul's School in Nampa, St. Mary's School in Boise, and St. Joseph's School, St. Gertrude's Academy and the College of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, ID.

She was appointed administrator of Our Lady of Consolation Hospital in Cotton-

wood in 1959. Her next years were very busy with the planning and building of the current St. Mary's Hospital in Cottonwood which opened March 21, 1965.

In 1967 Sr. Regina was elected Prioress. Her leadership years coincided with early changes from the Second Vatican Council. She led the community through a sometimes painful transition from an authoritarian to a more collaborative form of governance. She inspired the sisters with hope and courage as they let go of familiar ministries in order to meet emerging needs in the church and society. Although she trusted God's call and saw the life and growth that came from change, Sr. Regina still experienced pain over the many sisters who left the community during the aftermath of Vatican II and over the closing of St. Gertrude's Academy.



At the end of her term as prioress, Sr. Regina joined Sr. Maria Elena Schaefer in Cali, Colombia, South America, to work with the poor. In 1980 they moved to Bogota, Colombia, where they joined other Idaho Benedictines to open a dependent monastery with hopes of founding a permanent community there. Sr. Regina was elected to lead the new community. When the

new community closed in 1994, Sr. Regina returned to the states and began to minister with Hispanic people in Caldwell. She served as Subprioress at St. Gertrude's until her retirement in 1999.

She is survived by her monastic community in Cottonwood, a niece, a nephew and a cousin. Memorials may be made to the Monastery of St. Gertrude.

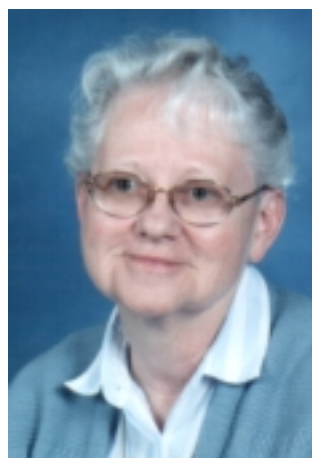
Renewal, from page 1

know us is to love us" appears to be true as many people return again and again for both group and individual retreats.

Last year we defined the focus of the Spirituality and Retreat Ministry around three themes: monasticism, women and the land. While not exclusive, the focus helps us set priorities for retreat offerings. Another area of growth has been our Outreach Retreat Ministry. Many of our sisters present short Advent and Lenten retreats at sites away from the monastery, for Catholic and Protestant groups, thus giving retreat opportunities in a broadening circle.

I hear a lot of things from retreatants, but one thing I always hear is how much they appreciate praying with the sisters. The hospitality that they experience while here provides a safety net, allowing inner explora-

tion and growth. People express how they feel their burdens being lifted as they drive up the hill to the monastery, how joy and peace fill their hearts during their stay, and how they return home refreshed and nourished. I believe we serve the church and the world well by providing this place of replenishment and sanctuary. Ministers of all denominations and people of all faiths "come away" for renewal which enables them to live more balanced and contemplative lives back home.



Sr. Lillian Englert

Over the years we may have become more sophisticated in our means of publicity, our fees have increased and our housing has expanded to meet the demand, but the reality remains that God works wondrous deeds here among the beauty of creation and the daily living of our monastic life.

As we seek to incorporate healing hospitality, grateful simplicity, and creative peacemaking into our lives, we hold the same hopes and goals as our predecessors. Our world still hungers for prayer and spiritual meaning and we hope that the transforming action of God moves freely among us and touches those who come in contact with us.

St. Gertrude's Canticle: A Journal of Our Life is published quarterly by the Development Office at the Monastery of St. Gertrude. **Sr. Mary Kay Henry, OSB**, Director of Development. **Darla Anglen-Whitley**, Editor. (208) 962-3224 EMAIL develop@connectwireless.us • www.StGertrudes.org

Rhythms of Prayer, Quiet and Community

by Kathy McFaul, Spirituality Ministry Director

*I came in darkness and you lit a candle ...
I felt the spirit of God and you shared it
with me. I leave here a changed woman of
God who carries a light heart. ~ Retreatant*

As Sr. Lillian related in her article, some form of retreat ministry has been offered here since before 1970. There has been a recent shift from using the term "Retreat Ministry" to broadening it to "Spirituality Ministry." This more closely reflects the fact that the growth and nurturing that springs from the Monastery of St. Gertrude is broader than coming here to make a retreat. Individual and group retreats continue to be a major component of what we offer, but we are also providing outreach and on-line retreats as well as spiritual direction. Increasingly, women and men seek spiritual companionship to help them listen prayerfully for how God is moving in their lives and how that movement might be supported.

The term "Spirituality Ministry" also links us to the lives of others. Not everyone can get away and make a retreat but we all have a spirituality. We share a connection to and, at some level, a yearning for the Spirit. At my college reunion people were thinking about what work they did and how they did it, how they raise their children, the consciousness that they sought to bring to the start and close of their days. They were exploring how to live their lives in ways that were fed and shaped by their faith, ways that nourished them and the people around them.

People come here when they recognize that they need to step away from their daily activities in order to broaden and deepen their spirituality. Some folks arrive already knowing that they need to move away from distractions in order to come to the quiet

place within and listen for God's voice. Some come with an undefined yearning. There is a peacefulness in this land and in the beauty that surrounds it. There is a graciousness in the sisters' welcome. There is a rhythm of prayer and quiet, solitude and community that creates an environment for the powerful and sometimes challenging process of retreat.

We have begun to focus our ministry on what is unique about St. Gertrude's that we

expression of spirituality, we also seek to provide options that might appeal to all and hope the feminine expressions are inclusive and supportive to everyone who comes.

The monastery is surrounded by the beauty of God's creation. Wandering the grounds or gazing out the window contributes to healing, growth and drawing closer to God. Hearts are softened, reinforced by praying with community, singing "all nature is too thin a veil to hide your radiant majesty," or chanting that sun and moon, mountains and hills all give praise to our God.

The community has had a growing sense of the importance of Spirituality Ministry to individuals and to a world desperately in need of peace and prayerfulness. They have been discerning the call to make this ministry more available by expanding it and improving the available space and programs.



Participants gather in the Renewal Center on the fourth floor for a weekend retreat on Hildegard's spirituality and the land.

can share with those who come here. We arrived at three components that are already a part of who we are and help define how we move forward. This is a monastic community, a community of women, and a community that lives close to the earth and respects God's gift of the land.

This focus is not exclusive but a reality that reflects this community. The spirituality of this place is grounded in a monastic tradition that stretches back for centuries. It is reflected in the Divine Office prayed throughout the day and the monastic profession lived by the sisters in community, following the Rule of St. Benedict.

It is embodied in the strong women who practice their faith here. While many retreat themes and styles reflect a feminine

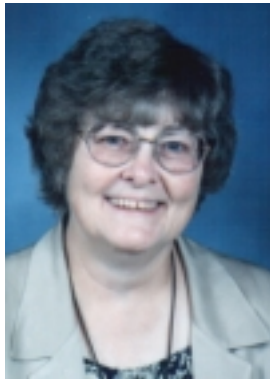
Retreatants often tell us that they leave here with a change of heart. The gift is mutual; our hearts are touched as well. As a still-recovering workaholic, I can get caught up in my "to do" list, striving for the gold medal in task completion. When I have a conversation with a retreatant over dinner or sit with someone in spiritual direction, my priorities get re-aligned. I am inspired by the faithfulness of a journey, by the clarity of an insight, by the courage and perseverance in hard times. I am grateful for the reminders that this is why I am here, that here lies the heart of this ministry.

Retreatants refresh my appreciation for being here, living in this beautiful spot on God's earth, working with people of faith and vision, participating in a ministry that deepens my own faith. It is privilege.

Spirituality and Parish Life

by Sr. Corinne Forsman

Kathleen Fischer describes spirituality in *Winter Grace* as, “the deepest dimension of all of life. The spiritual is the ultimate ground of all our questions, hopes, fears, and loves ... spirituality is the discovery of new talents, deeper peace, wider boundaries of love. Christian spirituality involves the entire human person in all of his or her relationships.”



Sr. Corinne Forsman

This is my third year ministering as Pastoral associate at Holy Family Parish in Clarkston, WA. I find many examples of “alive” spirituality in my daily work and I will try to share ways that I experience, and hopefully enhance, the spirituality of people here in the parish.

I sense a deep spirituality among our senior parishioners who are consistently open to learning more about the Scriptures and other facets of the Church. Typical of their spirituality is their other-centeredness and their care for one another. Once I visited with a homebound, dying elder. Before I could begin a sentence she shared with me her experience of caring for my mother when my older brother was born. This focus on others amazes me!

Parish life calls us to our baptismal commitment through service. Many are needed to minister in the parish as catechists and

members of committees – liturgy, social concerns and spirituality just to name a few. The commitment to growth and the discovery and use of talents and gifts are expressions of profound spirituality.

Recently, at a Mass and Anointing for our homebound and care center members, I discovered that one of our guests, age 62 and a Vietnam veteran, had not been invited out since he was a teenager. Christ must certainly be the “ultimate ground” of his being! He calls us to a deeper awareness of other people in similar circumstances.

The world, the church, our parish – all are the Body of Christ. With one another we relive Christ’s birth, life, passion, death and resurrection. With one another we experience the spiritual as the ultimate ground of all our questions, hopes, fears, and loves.

Sanctuary at St. Gertrude’s

by Nancy Collins-Warner

I learned about St. Gertrude’s from a friend almost 15 years ago. I had some trepidation about coming to a Catholic monastery (my heritage being Protestant), mostly around being comfortable in chapel and at Mass. However, having a welcoming sister who “showed me the ropes” soon put me at ease. What I had not anticipated was the power of the place.

Immediately upon entering the circle of St. Gertrude’s, which, for me, takes in Cottonwood Butte and the broad vistas across the Camas Prairie to the mountains, I felt an almost magnetic pull. I was entering “sacred space”, both geographically and spiritually. It was clear that the daily practices of prayer and silence have imbued the monastery and its environs with a deep peacefulness and tranquility.

On subsequent visits to the monastery, I could literally feel the stress and inner chaos fall away as the buildings came into view. Tears fell, and I remembered a deeper, truer source of energy and meaning in my life.

My husband refers to my retreats as “going to your ashram.” St. Gertrude’s has not only rekindled a dormant spiritual life, but also provided me the opportunity to reflect on, find resource for, and be inspired in, my journey. I have taken a variety of retreats: brief 24 hour “emergency pit stops”; longer intentional silence, fasting and prayer; and several topical group retreats. Each has been renewing and challenging.

When I get to St. Gertrude’s all distractions from my daily life are removed, and I can relax into God’s presence and be

infused with the love, prayer and practice of women whose lives are devoted to God.

Through the years I have become more reciprocal as a guest of the monastery, as my appreciation and awareness of its generous hospitality have deepened: I can volunteer time helping out when I am there; I can make financial contributions; and I can hold the lives and ministry of the women there in prayer, that they continue to be able to bless others as much as they have me. I am truly grateful.

Nancy Collins-Warner is currently on sabbatical (which includes regular retreat time) engaged in prayerful discernment about future work and commitments. She is an active member of St. James Episcopal parish in Pullman, WA.

No Time To Pray!

"Some of the best things in my life happened to me by surprise," quips Sr. Lucille Nachtsheim, "including my vocation!"

Sr. Lucille's life story reads like a movie script. Her father died when she was young. Her mother remarried and shortly thereafter passed away. Her step-father took her in. He eventually remarried and Sr. Lucille's life began to resemble Cinderella's.

In 1933 several sisters from St. Gertrude's arrived in Ontario, OR, with a truck to collect boxes of fruit from the orchards. Sr. Lucille (Mary Anna), who was to attend St. Gertrude's Academy, and her trunk were tossed into the back of the truck with the fruit. She sat on her trunk on the way back to Cottonwood.

That year she attended classes at the Academy. Just before the school year ended, Mother Scholastica Uhlenkott called her into the office and asked if she would like to be a Candidate.

"I told her 'no' emphatically and repeatedly," remembers Sr. Lucille. "I loved the sisters and St. Gertrude's, but I didn't feel I was devout enough to be a sister."

Mother Scholastica asked her to pray about it, so Lucille did. She decided to make a list of all the things sisters did that she could not do. At the top of the list was "all the praying ... I knew there was no way I could do all that praying ..."

That night as she lay in bed, the 16-year old girl continued to consider the possibility of life as a sister. There really wasn't much to go home to, so the option began to look more appealing.



Sr. Lucille remembers, "As I lay there, God's Spirit took hold of me. The room was filled with a kind of emptiness, but God was right there. I felt a deep certainty and security, and from that moment on I knew I was to be a sister at St. Gertrude's.

"I hope in death to be seized again that very same way and experience anew that exact certainty and security. I have never regretted my decision."

After profession, Sr. Lucille taught school in St. Maries and Cottonwood, ID, then returned to the monastery. For the

next 19 years she served as the formation director. During the tumultuous years of Vatican II, she was Sub-prioress with Prioress Regina O'Connell. Together they made a good team, with Sr. Regina's deliberateness and Sr. Lucille's impetuosity. Eventually she found time to write the history of the Idaho Benedictines in her book, *On the Way*, published in 1997.

Would Sr. Lucille recommend the Benedictine life to women today? Absolutely.

"The hardest thing for today's women to come to terms with is the 'lifelong' promise to God and community. Lifelong and permanence aren't appealing in this society of constant flux. People no longer understand commitment."

For those not considering religious life, Sr. Lucille believes that "everyone has a relationship with God because God loves them. Our response to that love is what creates a personal relationship with God. Personal prayer and group prayer strengthens the relationship."

In retirement now, Sr. Lucille admits to another of life's little surprises: she finally has enough time for all the praying!

Vocation News

by Sr. Janet Marie Barnard

Thank you for making our vocations promotions a success. We have five women in initial formation – one sister preparing for perpetual profession, two novices and two postulants. We also have several women looking at becoming affiliates, the initial step of entering into a closer relationship with the community.

In January Sr. Petronilla Lieser retired from St. Theresa's Parish in Orofino, ID. In gratitude for her work, the parish



contributed nearly \$5,000 to our vocations program through a vocations fund which they established in Sr. Petronilla's honor. Here Sr. Mary Kay Henry (L-R) and Postulants Mary Mendez and Carla Fontes receive the donation from Jo Moore of St. Theresa's.

Also in January, Doug Houle, Grand Knight of the Moscow Council of the Knights of Columbus, presented a donation to us for our vocation efforts. Doug hand-delivered the check (that's



me, on the right!) as a sign of the Knights' strong support for vocations.

Thanks, also, to the Knights in Lewiston, ID, who hosted a pancake breakfast on March 3, to support our vocations efforts.



DEVELOPMENTS

by Sr. Mary Kay Henry, Director of Development

We are focusing our spring fundraising goals and appeal on promoting vocations through personal contacts and presentations, advertising, scholarships for inquiring women to visit the monastery, and salary support for Sr. Janet Marie Barnard, our Vocations Director. Look for more information in your mailbox in April.

It is a joy to share with you that Sr. Teresa Jackson is preparing to make perpetual monastic profession in July. You can read about Sr. Teresa's work in outreach retreats and online retreats on page 7. Novices Jean Ihli and Michele Bateman and Postulants Mary Mendez and Carla Fontes continue in their initial formation process, and we have two other women seriously looking at joining us this fall.

New members are one of the signs of life urging us to build a future full of hope. Other signs of life are emerging ministries such as a live-in volunteer program and monastery-based industries which push us to look more closely at space issues within the monastery. Our spirituality and retreat ministry is growing and the museum is desperately short of work and storage space. Our desire to meet the needs of those seeking a time and space to refocus and return to their lives refreshed and strengthened for service leads us to explore building a spirituality center with a conference room, smaller meeting rooms, storage and work space for the museum, and additional sleeping space for guests, retreatants and conference participants.

In the last issue of *The Canticle*, Sr. Jean wrote about our future plans to rearrange office and work space in the historic monastery structure in order to enhance the silence and solitude essential for a vital monastic life. The quiet generates a reverent

and prayerful atmosphere that overflows in service, especially in our prayer ministry, spirituality and retreat ministry, museum, and in our care of the land.

The project will also help make the monastery building more energy efficient, allow for technology updates, and overall, improve the building's suitability for the activities and ministries of this century.

We have put together a design team with architects and contractors to "dream" the center, and we are making preparations for the fundraising to make the dream a reality. We ask your prayers for wisdom as we take this major step in faith.

Every five years we invite sisters from other monasteries to help us evaluate how we are living the Benedictine way of life. This is called Visitation, and we have been preparing for it this past year. We rely on your prayers of support during the last weeks of March when the visitors will review our finances, organizational structures, ministries, and more to affirm our strengths and make recommendations for areas needing growth. The whole community will gather at the conclusion of the Visitation for the summary of the process.



Museum Notes

by Lyle Wirtanen, Director

Historical Museum at St. Gertrude

This year's Victorian Mother's Day Tea will be held on Saturday, May 10, in the refectory of the Monastery of St. Gertrude. The theme will be the "Victorian Garden."

Due to increased interest in this annual event, two seatings will be offered again this year. The first serving will be from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. (Pacific Time) with the second serving from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m.

The Victorian Tea coincides with Mother's Day weekend and provides a unique opportunity to treat a mother, daughter, grandmother, or special person, male or female, to a truly enjoyable afternoon.

Tickets are \$15.00 per person, including children, with all proceeds to benefit The Historical Museum at St. Gertrude. Seating is limited and reservation are required. To make your reservation call (208) 962-7123, or email: museum@velocitus.net.

Last year we co-sponsored a symposium with the Nez Perce Tribe and the National Park Service entitled *Nez Perce Country: A Symposium*. This year the same groups are sponsoring another event *Living Together Into the Future: A Forum*. This year's forum will discuss treaty rights and tribal sovereignty issues and will be held on June 12, 2003, at Kamiah High School in Kamiah, Idaho.

Keith Allred, who helped negotiate the memorandum of understanding between the Nez Perce Tribe and North Central Idaho Jurisdictional Alliance will be one of the speakers. Allred is from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. Additional information should be available by May 1, 2003. For more information, contact Lyle Wirtanen at (208) 962-7123 or email: director@velocitus.net.

Reaching Out ~ Sharing Our Lives

by Sr. Teresa Jackson, Outreach Retreats Coordinator

Our outreach program is a natural extension of our spirituality ministry. Many people enjoy the chance to come here to the monastery and share in our prayer and daily life and to experience the power of this place.

For some people, however, it can be hard to get away to Cottonwood. Or, perhaps, they want a retreat for a group within their own community or parish.

The outreach retreat and spirituality ministry responds to the needs of people who desire to have a retreat or spirituality presentation at their place. This is a continuation of what the monastery has always done in a more formal way.

So, if a group of people in a community or parish wish to have a retreat, we supply speakers to go to their site and lead a retreat. Sometimes they ask for spiritual direction, and so we send one of our trained spiritual directors.

This component of our retreat and spirituality ministry has really begun to expand in the last several years. In 2002 we presented 54 retreats or presentations to a total of 1,050 participants. We've also made 124 outreach spiritual direction visits with 35 participants.

While most of our presentations are to Catholic parishes, 13 of the 54 outreach programs last year were made to Protestant or ecumenical groups.

We also make presentations to specialized groups, basing the retreat on professional interests such as social services, family caregivers and church secretaries.



In addition to our outreach retreats we also have been developing our "online retreats." These are retreats that folks can take at their leisure via our website. Participants are given a structured input and suggestions for making their own personal retreat in the privacy of their home. This outreach ministry is growing in popularity and allows us to reach people across the globe who would otherwise not be able to make a retreat, or come

**[We] share our spirituality ...
life and values ... with others.**

in contact with the Benedictine sisters in Cottonwood.

We currently have two retreats on-line: *God's Delightful Voice* - a look at Benedictine spirituality for everyday, and *Praying With Julian of Norwich* - a seven-day retreat that looks at Julian's prayer style.

Doing outreach retreats is a powerful and mutually-enhancing exchange between those of us who facilitate the retreats and the participants. We hope that this way of sharing our Benedictine life and values and the strengths of our community life will continue to be inspiration and encouragement for many. Participants' sharing of their faith journeys and values often move us deeply and call us to renewed faithfulness to our monastic vocations.

On-Line Retreats: What people are saying ...

[I] appreciated the online retreat very much. Already had a copy of Julian's Showings but had difficulty "sticking" with it. The retreat was very helpful in keeping me focused so that I could benefit from her inspired writing. Thank you for sponsoring it and I hope that you continue the online retreats for those of us who are pressed for time. ~ Washington

This is wonderful. I am homebound because of cancer and not able to attend retreats in person. ~ Texas

This [online retreat] was referred to me by a friend ... I am excited, as my busy schedule, work, caring for aged parents, I don't get out much, but am hungry to learn more of Christ. Thanks much. ~ Pennsylvania

I have not heard of an online retreat and I think it is a great idea. I am going to share this with my friends at [my parish] and hope to get a few of us started on this. God bless you, Sisters. ~ Idaho

Great idea. I need the structure and guidance and this should work really well. Look forward to starting. ~ Australia

Come Away to a Retreat

Voices from the Margins:

Listening to the Hidden Women of the Gospels

April 4 - 6, 2003 (Friday, 7:30 PM to Sunday, 1:30 PM)

Presenter: Sr. Teresa Jackson

When we read the Gospel stories, we often forget that women were among the first and strongest disciples of Jesus. Through their discipleship they proclaimed the Good News of the Reign of God and challenged the accepted role of women in their culture. Look again at the stories of these women and how they are role models of faith and discipleship in difficult times.

Prophets, Losses & Change:

Men & Women Building the Reign of God

May 16 - 18, 2003 (Friday, 7:30 PM to Sunday, 1:30 PM)

Presenter: Sr. Mary Kay Henry

Explore the call of a prophet to be a catalyst who helps people see and name their oppression, grieve the pain, discover a new vision within and live it out. Based on *The Prophetic Imagination* by Walter Brueggemann.

All You Birds of the Air, Bless the Lord

June 13 - 15, 2003 (Fri. 7:30 PM to Sun. 1:30 PM)

Coordinators: Sr. Carol Ann Wassmuth, Jim Greene & Birds

A weekend for anyone who likes to watch birds. Guided bird-watching tours interspersed with reflection time on the message sent to us from God through our feathered friends. Bring binoculars, bird book and Bible. Beginners welcome.

Come to the Quiet

June 17 - 24, 2003 (Tuesday, 7:30 PM to Tuesday 1:30 PM)

Directors: Sr. Lillian Englert & Kathy McFaul

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

This retreat is also offered January 16-23, 2004.



Visit us on the web: www.StGertrudes.org

Email: retreat@stgertrudes.org

outreachretreats@hotmail.com



IDAHO CORP. OF BENEDICTINE SISTERS

Monastery of St. Gertrude

HC 3 Box 121, Cottonwood, ID 83522-9408

Look Inside ...

30 Years
of Retreat Ministry

Sr. Regina O'Connell
Remembered

Explore the Net:
Online Retreats



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