

Canticle of St. Gertrude

A Journal of Our Life

Fall 2011

Leadership

The prioress as steward: giving the gifts that have been given



Among a prioress' many responsibilities, none is more important than stewarding the human resources of the monastery. The Sisters, their gifts, talents, spiritual growth, well-being, education and health are her greatest concern so that the community is healthy, vibrant and able to live its mission of prayer and service with dedication and passion.

The prioress is also the steward of the monastery's material possessions.

I am always amazed when I hear the story of a past prioress who did all the Monastery's bookkeeping by herself...and without a calculator — just a checkbook, pencil and eraser! I am even more amazed to hear of the days when the community owned only one car. Nor did past prioresses attend Federation meetings to consult with other prioresses regarding business issues until 1939.



Sister Clarissa Goeckner, Prioress

Monastic life was much simpler then.

As steward of the material goods of the monastery, today's prioress has a wide range of responsibilities requiring specialized knowledge and skills. She has oversight of all financial matters. This includes overseeing the Corporate Ministries: our Historical Museum through which we preserve our past entrusted to our care;

our Spirituality Ministry through which we care for and respond to the spiritual longing of those who come for retreat; and Stewardship of the Land through which we express care for our planet. The prioress is also

responsible for our Inn at St. Gertrude, our Healing Ministry, the Monastery departments, and the individual ministries in which the Sisters are engaged in service near and far. She holds responsibility for strategic planning and with her Sisters keeps moving toward the community's preferred future. (With the help of our oblates, employees, donors, deacons, vendors, friends, priests, volunteers, we began this exciting task in the fall of 2007 and are still on the way to achieve our 2020 vision.)

"Everything which we use in this life was here before us and will be here after we are gone. This world and everything in it is on loan, entrusted to our care for our time."

~John McQuiston, II, "Always We Begin Again: The Benedictine Way of Living"

These demands, as you might guess, exceed the energy and competency of any one person! Fortunately St. Benedict also knew this to be true. He suggests that the abbot/prioress share some of these responsibilities with community members who are "humble, wise, responsible, and treat the goods of the monastery like the sacred vessels of the altar." *Rule of Benedict 31:10* Those to whom such responsibilities are delegated must also remember at all times that "everything which we use in this life was here before us and will be here after we are gone. This world and everything in it is on loan, entrusted to our care for our time." *John McQuiston, II, "Always We Begin Again: The Benedictine Way of Living", p. 52.*

Guided by this ideal, the prioress appoints/hires the help she needs to administer the material resources of the community. For example, here at St. Gertrude's, the finance council and business office share in the administration of our material goods. The development office assists with a wide range of tasks related to the Monastery's viability by inviting others to participate in our ministries through gifts, donations and prayer support.

Continued on page 7.

Sister's Story

Sister Agnes Reichlin: life to the fullest

Sister Agnes Reichlin's story with the Monastery began long before she was born. Her great grandparents on her mother's side are John and Gertrude Uhlenkott, who offered the land that brought the Swiss Sisters to Cottonwood nearly one hundred years ago. Her dad, also a Swiss immigrant, often worked for the St. Gertrude's community as a woodcutter and farmer. Her mother grew up near the convent and her family was closely associated to the Community through Mother Scholastica Uhlenkott.

In first grade Agnes rode to a one-room schoolhouse west of Keuterville on a pony her father gave her. In second grade she was sent to boarding school at nearby St. Gertrude's. "Five miles was a long way back then," she says. Amidst the nuns she began to have a sense of her own vocation.

Still, the thought that she might best serve the world as a mother stayed in her mind. But one rainy day at school she playfully threw her gym clothes over her head and asked her teacher, 'How do you like my veil?' 'Pretty nice,' the nun replied. 'Where will that happen?' 'Right here,' Agnes blurted out. From then on she knew that St. Gertrude's was where she belonged.



Sister Agnes teaches LPN students about how to use a new wheelchair, 1965.



Sister Agnes Reichlin

Life began to move very quickly. Agnes began working evenings and Saturdays at St. Mary's Hospital doing laundry. Then her father died when she was just 16.

On February 1st, 1952, when Agnes was 18 and much to the initial unhappiness of her mother, Agnes entered St. Gertrude's. A year and a half later she made her First Profession. A year after that she was sent to Ogden, Utah, to study nursing.

After receiving her nursing diploma, Sister Agnes was sent to work at St. Benedict's Hospital in Jerome. Almost immediately she began to teach LPN classes. "I had always said I'd never be a teacher," she says, "but I discovered I like teaching adults." Today several Sisters credit Sister Agnes as influential in their own nursing careers. In 1965 she entered Seattle University, testing through many of the classes and completing her bachelor's degree in two years. Twelve months after that she obtained a master's degree in Nursing Administration and Maternal Child Health from University of Washington. She then became Director of Nursing, first at Jerome and then at St. Mary's Hospital in Cottonwood, where she stayed for the next 22 years.

During her long career Sister Agnes has witnessed great change both in medicine and in the St. Gertrude's Community, particularly after Vatican II. "It's always very interesting to be involved in change," she says. "When I first came here, we prayed the Office in Latin. Then we changed to English. It was disappointing at first. I loved the rhythm of the Latin. But then I realized it was so nice to understand what I was praying."

Now, at nearly 78 years old, she directs the Monastery infirmary, is Director of Formation and facilitates retreats at Spirit Center that integrate arts, nature and healing. "Nursing taught me to be observant and listen," she says. "Healing has a lot to do with emotional and spiritual well-being. All of life is a healing journey and this community has a role to play in helping people heal. Jesus said, 'I came so that you may have life and have life to the fullest.' I do whatever I can to help people come to that." ✕

Summer of youth

The Monastery experienced a summer of youth, energy and new vitality thanks to the women who participated in the first summer of the “Monastic Immersion Experience”, a program to allow women to volunteer and experience our way of life for eight weeks. Four young women, ranging in age from twenty to thirty-four, stayed with us while participating in an internship in a Monastery department, attending classes on monastic topics, engaging in spiritual direction and sharing our life of work and prayer.

Jennifer from Austin, Texas; McKenzie from Spokane, Washington; Erika from Pullman, Washington; and Danielle from Chicago, Illinois, all engaged fully in the community life of the monastery from praying to picking raspberries to learning to knit and play a mean game of pinochle. Two of them helped out at Spirit Center, one worked with the marketing and communications department and one worked wherever help was needed.

Sisters frequently shared how much they enjoyed the life and energy of the group. The participants expressed appreciation for the chance to learn more about our way of life. They also reported being surprised at how fun the Sisters are (alas, old stereotypes die hard).

“It has been a life-changing experience for them and us,” said Sr. Teresa Jackson, membership coordinator. “We are profoundly grateful for their presence among us this summer.” Next year’s Monastic Immersion Experience is tentatively set for: May 29th – July 24th (session one) and August 3rd–31st (session two). For more information or an application please contact Sister Teresa at volunteer@stgertrudes.org. ✕



The Monastic Immersion Experience participants get centered on one of Sister Teresa’s field trips.

Planned giving

It is with deep gratitude that we extend our appreciation for our friends, donors and benefactors. We consider you our partners in ministry; you are included when we reference our “community”. One of the many important facets of our commitment to you is good financial stewardship.



**Carolyn Radakovich,
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The gifts that we receive are treasured – especially because we realize that, in a world where needs grow daily, you choose the Monastery of St. Gertrude over and over again. Proper stewardship of our gifts is about a long-term trust which means not only being fiscally smart about the current year but also about planning for financial viability 20, 30 and 40 years from now.

Many donors and benefactors have said to me that they choose St. Gertrude’s for their charitable gifts because “it’s just something that needs to continue” – “it” taking many forms (prayer, service, a place to interact with Benedictine spirituality, etc). As partners and members of our extended community, I would invite you to consider becoming part of our Planned Giving program. This is the next level of our donor program and includes things like: naming the Monastery in your will, structuring your estate plan to make us a designee for things like retirement or life insurance benefits, or making gifts of stock or property.

Making a charitable contribution from your assets is a powerful way to give. As a donor, designating a portion of your assets to a non-profit shields you (and/or your family) from a portion of the taxes associated with dispensation of your monies. This gives you, the person who worked hard to earn and save your assets, more control over where that money will eventually go.

We realize and respect the fact that people’s assets are an incredibly private part of their lives. Please know that any details you may choose to discuss with the Monastery of St. Gertrude will be highly protected. We also encourage you to discuss the Planned Giving concept with a financial professional. Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to a continued partnership with you. ✕

Spirituality and the Arts ignites

At the end of September, the Spirituality and the Arts program at St. Gertrude will be one year old. It has been a dynamic year of performances and retreats that engage artistic expression as devotion and the deepening of spirituality through creativity.

The program began on September 26, 2010 with a performance by "The Sharp Five Jazztet" featuring Fr. Gary Uhlenkott, S.J. and an exhibit of Sr. Carolyn Miguel's icons. In October, vocalist/flutist Katherine Ramos Baker helped present a retreat on Hildegard of Bingen and performed a candlelight concert of her music.

This year's retreat line-up has included the new Creative Expressions retreats: "Grace-Filled Knitting" and "Artists in Our Midst" as well as two summer arts retreats, "Watercolor as Spiritual Practice" and "The Sacred Art of Traditional Iconography". This fall features "Poetry in Nature" and "Praying in Color".



Father Damian Higgins blesses the participants' icons.



A blessing of the artists.

"All I've ever painted is my God experience, my prayer experience," says artist Dr. John Jerry-Anthony Parente, leader of this summer's watercolor retreat. Parente guided 18 retreatants into a deeper understanding of art as an expression of self that is created by God. He challenged participants "to be ecstatic, to flow and blend with the vastness."

The summer of art continued in August with Fr. Damian Higgins' week of iconography, a retreat that filled not long after it was announced last spring. Father Damian led participants in learning the theology and techniques that relate to writing icons. "Icons are sacramental," he explained, "something material that conveys a spiritual reality...a window of hope." At the end of the week, Father Damian blessed both the icons and the artists.

On September 11 of this year, the Gonzaga University Choir gave a performance in the Monastery chapel. Led by director Timothy Westerhaus, 56 voices filled the chapel with a mix of sacred and secular, historical and contemporary music.

To learn more about upcoming Spirituality and the Arts events, visit www.Spirit-Center.org, where you can also sign up to receive monthly updates. ✕

Upcoming Retreats *at Spirit Center*

September 23 – 25: The Everyday Monastic:
The Benedictine Way for Ordinary People

October 18 – 20: Praying in Color

November 4 – 6: Losses of Our Lives

November 11 – 13: Introduction to Centering Prayer

November 18 – 20: Making a Meaningful Christmas

December 1 – 15: Silence the Christmas Noise:
Advent Retreat

January 27 – February 3: Come to the Quiet

February 17 – 24: Centering Prayer Intensive

Learn more at www.Spirit-Center.org

St. Benedict

They decided to poison you
On a whim
Out of the human condition called jealousy
And they plotted against you
And once more, like Jesus, they planned to take you away,
useless to them

The scheme was simple, poison the cup
You blessed it, as you always did, giving all to God
And the cup burst and fluid flowed forth
Then, the bread was poisoned, this must not fail
Yet, you blessed the bread and a raven soared down and
Stole the bread
And you lived on, consumed in this miracle

Now, 1500 years later, your Rule sustains those who seek God
The Raven sits beside the Lord
As does the thief;
Bless the food and drink
And watch the miracles unfold.

~Affiliate Amber Lewis

Sanity

If I could open my eyes with my eyes closed,
Would I see the saints standing around me?
If I could get over the appearance of reality,
Would I see the rest of the world hidden beneath?

I woke up when I wasn't sleeping
Under a tall pine in the cemetery on the hill and saw
Women in black standing around me
Substantial as though they stood firmly on another plain.

Some smiled that they had seen me before and
Some nodded, knowingly, like grandmothers amongst the young.
They embraced me without touching, their skirts touched by a breeze
Different from the one that moved the wildflowers at my feet.

And they followed me as I made my way down the hill,
A great cloud of mothers like a finely spun thread holding me in place.
If I open my eyes I can still see them,
Hear them whispering persistently to the colors of my heart.

~Erika Szymanski, Monastic Immersion Experience Intern

Evening Prayer

Evening prayer at the Monastery of St. Gertrude
Sitting beside my friend, Sister Cecile

I had been here before
engaged with the Sisters' voices
Eagle strong Dove soft.

"Oh Lord, you search me and you know me,
You know my resting and my rising.

Four years had gone by...

You discern my purpose from afar

Twenty-four years earlier
When first I visited and heard
The Sisters' melody of prayer

You mark when I walk or lie down,

Seasons had passed
sun set moon rose sun came sun went
Summer and early autumn were my chosen seasons
to visit those years.

All my ways lie open to you.

~Michele J. Charvet. Read the rest of this poem online at
www.StGertrudes.org, on the Spirituality and the Arts page.

Debra's Poem

Ah, life is just a mop and bucket, sometimes
but still
pleasantly introspective
thinking about life, or just small moments
here and there
and then, in the quiet hall
I hear
A sweet-voiced nun, singing her praise
And I smile.

~Debra Graham, Monastery Employee

By our Monastic Profession, we commit ourselves to seeking God and God's reign among us. Our Community's philosophy of social justice follows the basic principles as outlined by Catholic social justice teaching:

- **Human Dignity** – Each person is endowed by God with human dignity and should be respected as a unique expression of the Divine.
- **The Call to Community and the Common Good** – As a reflection of our Triune God, everyone depends upon and must contribute to the common good.
- **The Rights and Responsibilities of the Person** – As an expression of our Living God, each person has a fundamental right to and responsibility for life and to that which makes life possible.
- **The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers** – As an expression of our Creative God, each person has the right and responsibility to work productively in safe conditions for fair wages.
- **The Option for the Poor and Vulnerable** – The whole society is strengthened when everyone is empowered to become an active participant.
- **Solidarity** – In an interdependent world, we relate to all as members of one human family. Solidarity expresses the Church's concern for world peace, global development and human rights.
- **Care for Creation** – As an expression of our Creative God, we recognize our interdependence with all creation and pledge to respect and care for it.

Our 2008 Vision Statement challenges us to be awakened by prayer so that impelled by justice we may act with compassion. Through our daily prayer, our ministries and our relationships we strive to be faithful to this calling. ✕



As a community we have financially supported Family Promise's Box City project in Lewiston since its beginning. People spend the night in a cardboard box both as a way to identify with the homeless and to raise money for the program. Family Promise organizes local churches to offer overnight shelter for homeless families in the valley. They are a living example of the social justice principles listed above.

Sister Cynthia's Monastic Profession

In an age-old ceremony introduced with violin strains of "Edelweiss", Sister Cynthia Louise Schultz made her Perpetual Monastic Profession on July 30 in the chapel.



Sister Cynthia Schultz surrounded by Prioress Sister Clarissa Goeckner, House Coordinator Sister Mary Geis and Assistant Prioress Sister Bernadette Stang.

Amidst family, friends and the Sisters of St. Gertrude, Sr. Cynthia pledged lifelong commitment to the monastic way of life with community, stability and obedience according to the Rule of St. Benedict. The Sisters responded with their promise of acceptance and support. This reciprocal promise was further ritualized in the alternate singing of the "Suscipe" which emphasizes hope in God's promise of fidelity and support:

"Receive me, O Lord, as you have promised, that I may live, and disappoint me not in my hope. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be world without end. Amen."

While prostrate near the altar, Sister Cynthia was covered with the Resurrection Pall. The Monastic Community sang a Litany of Blessings and pronounced a solemn blessing over her. After being uncovered and rising to her feet, Cynthia received a gold ring that was blessed by Father Meinrad and presented by Sister Clarissa as "the seal of your faith in Christ and the sign of your vocation in this Community." Then as a closing of the beautiful and symbolic ceremony friends, family, well-wishers and Sisters enjoyed a reception in the dining room. ✕

The new stewards

In March of this year, Sr. Clarissa Goeckner was re-elected prioress of the Community. One of her first tasks was to appoint her leadership team who help guide and administer the various ministries and departments.

Sr. Mary Marge Goeckner, the Assistant Prioress of Sr. Clarissa's first term, is taking some sabbatical time, leaving the position open. Treasurer Sr. Emagene Warren also seeks sabbatical time and a new ministry. Sr. Clarissa elicited the wisdom of the Community regarding whose gifts would best fit these roles. She sent a letter to each Sister asking for input. Through a discernment process that included listening to these responses, Sr. Clarissa appointed her new leadership team.

The new Assistant Prioress is Sr. Bernadette Stang, an educator and missionary who is active in our spirituality ministry. "She has such a positive and upbeat spirit," says Sr. Clarissa. "I know she will bring new energy."

"I see us continuing to grow into our vision: 'Prayer awakens. Justice impels. Compassion acts. Thy Kingdom Come,'" says Sr. Bernadette. "I am excited to help Sister Clarissa and serve the Community this way."

In the previous term, Sr. Mary Geis was both procurator and house coordinator. In this term, she will retain her role as house coordinator. "She is ever attuned to detail," says Sr. Clarissa in describing Sr. Mary's activities of taking minutes, coordinating meetings, scheduling spaces, accommodating guests and writing down the daily Community Chronicles. "Her strong, gentle presence is an invaluable gift."

"This work," reflects Sr. Mary, "is about making our monastery a loving place of peace, not only for ourselves but also for others. I very much enjoy what I am called to do as a Benedictine monastic who together with my Sisters pray and work to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth."

Traditionally, the procurator was someone Benedict put in charge of all the material goods of the Monastery. The new procurator is Sr. Janet Barnard, who will oversee maintenance and operations, land stewardship, technology, the Historical Museum, and the business office. With big projects like the water pipeline replacement and geothermal installation on the horizon, the demands of this role are growing.



Left to right: Sisters Bernadette Stang, Clarissa Goeckner, Mary Geis and Janet Barnard.

"They call forth her way of thinking and being," stated Sr. Clarissa in describing Sr. Janet's many gifts for these responsibilities.

Even though she will still work as Director of Mission Integration at St. Mary's Hospital four days a week, Sr. Janet is excited. "Stewardship is such a big part of Benedict's idea. We manage all our things for the common good. We are also challenged to steward our own resources to make the world see in a different way. It's an economic model that's not about greed or fear. God's abundance allows for everything. And I think that because we share we can take risks others can't." ✕

The prioress as steward... Continued from page 1.

Our communications department is invaluable as our website and publications present who we are: our vision, mission and core values.

In addition to this assistance, the prioress hires and/or appoints department stewards to give skilled leadership to the day-to-day life of the monastery so that the community may extend its outreach of care to others.

That leads us to the heart of the matter.

Ministry is really what fuels the fundraising we do. It is not about us being financially secure, though that is a nice thought; it is about bringing security and support to others — to make a difference in people's lives as they deal with the serious issues of hunger, poverty, lack of education and many other needs.

We are called to greater awareness and concrete action by our vision statement: "Prayer awakens, Justice Impels, Compassion Acts". Through collaboration with our lay employees, oblates, volunteers, and partners in ministry, we continue to work together in faith. In addition to bills that need to be paid, we want our budget to reflect that our resources, human and material, are directed to the service and empowerment of other people. Stewarding the gifts we have been given, wisely and well, for the needs of our time is what we are all about. May we live up to the trust we have been given! ✕

The fruits of the earth

Like all the pioneers in the area, when our Sisters first settled in Cottonwood, they immediately set about planting an orchard. These original trees provided welcome fruit for the Community for many years but eventually grew old and unproductive. In the early 1990's a decision was made to rejuvenate the orchard. When Sr. Placida Wemhoff became plant manager in 1993 she assumed responsibility for its care. The first major task was to erect an 8-foot high fence to keep out the deer that had discovered this luscious source of food.

Caring for the fruit trees was a new experience for Sister Placida and through the years she has learned much about them. She discovered that the best fertilizer was ordinary grass clippings that also provided a moisture-retaining mulch. She devised a water drip system to keep the soil moist without damaging leaves and fruit. From an experienced fruit grower she learned the proper methods of pruning trees. But the biggest challenge she faced was the presence of apple fungus that had spread from the older trees. She keeps this pest under control with a carefully timed application of selected, environmentally-friendly herbicides. The fungus is able to survive the winter in the accumulated leaves and grass clippings, so before the first snow she removes the layer of mulch from around each tree.

Proper care of an orchard is hard work but the reward comes each fall when the fruit is ready to be harvested. Plums, cherries, pears and an assortment of apples are picked and enjoyed by the Sisters and our guests. For these fruits of the earth we are indeed grateful. ✕



Sister Placida Wemhoff in the Monastery orchard.

Raspberry Festival memories

The 19th Annual Raspberry Festival was a spectacular day filled with historical re-enactors, hands-on learning, delicious food and friends. Here are a few visual memories. To look at more photos and see the results of the Fun Run, Car Show and other festival events visit www.MyRaspberryFestival.org. ✕



Historical Museum *Fall Lecture Series*

September 29: "Early Songs of the Salmon River and Hells Canyon Region" with Dr. Gary Eller

October 6: "Tallyho for Idaho: The 19th-Century British Traveler in the West" with Terry Abraham

October 13: "Life on a Lookout: A Vanishing Lifestyle" with Linda de Eulis

October 20: "William Craig and the Nez Percés" with Lin Tull Cannell

October 27: "Restoration of Derelict Lands in the Pacific Northwest" with Dr. James Kingery

Thursdays, 7 p.m., FREE! Learn more at
www.HistoricalMuseumatStGertrude.org

