

CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

Spring 2017

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE

living everyday
sacredness

Divine Office
Lectio Divina
Silence

A Message from Prioress Sister Mary Forman

Benedict states in his rule: "We believe that the divine presence is everywhere..."above all let us believe this without any doubt when we stand for the divine work" [RB 19:1-2]. Praying the Divine Office is so important that eagerness for this prayer is one of three signs of a monastic vocation [RB 58.7]. Listening to the voice of God in the psalmody, scriptural readings, the hymns, antiphons, and canticles is the primary way to start and end each day, because one is in contact with God's presence spoken in the scripture in the community. The psalms are divided into two choirs as the sisters face each other in the oratory (chapel). The understanding is that as one choir voices God's message through the psalm verses, the other choir listens to God's word. Then they reverse the process, so each side speaks God's word and, in turn, listens to that word.

We pray in this way mindful that God's word can affect a change of heart slowly, gradually over a lifetime of fidelity to this form of prayer. Communal prayer is like a simmering crock pot, according to the monk Demetrius Dumm in his book, *Cherish Christ Above All*:

"I have tried to think of an image that would illustrate this subtle but effective action of the psalms on the minds and hearts of those who are faithful to them.

"Benedictines have always been very patient in matters of conversion, for they are convinced that haste is not fruitful in the long run."

~Demetrius Dumm

The image I have found most apt to express this mysterious action is that of the crock-pot. It cooks by a process that is very slow, quiet and unobtrusive, but it tenderizes the toughest cuts of meat in a way that is so subtle that one is invariably surprised at the result. Some may prefer the noisy, hissing pressure cooker, and it is no doubt effective too — and certainly takes less

time. But that is not the Benedictine way. Benedictines have always been very patient in matters of conversion, for they are convinced that haste is not fruitful in the long run. And I suspect that many a tough-willed monastic (or other Christian) has been made docile and gentle before God by faithful praying of the psalms."*

Some who come to pray with us have asked, "How can you pray the psalms that have so much violence in them?" My response is that we can pray in solidarity with all those who experience violence and harm and ask

God to bring healing and hope. Or one can pray a curse on cancer, on oppression, on human trafficking, and other systems that perpetuate evil on the vulnerable, while also asking forgiveness on the perpetrators of such violence.



Continued on page 6

OUR MISSION

Eager to welcome God's transforming power in ourselves and our world, we, the Benedictine Sisters of the Monastery of St. Gertrude, seek God together through monastic profession and respond in Healing Hospitality, Grateful Simplicity and Creative Peacemaking.

sister story

Sister Esther Velasquez

While her sisters keep the traditional Divine Office back at home in Cottonwood, Sister Esther has created a rhythm of prayer that nourishes her life on mission in Spokane. She begins the day with scripture and sometimes a meditation on a saint, then attends 8 a.m. Mass at St. Aloysius Church on the Gonzaga University campus or noon mass at Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral.

Throughout the day she finds many opportunities for meditation. She even considers her part-time work as a caregiver to a 95-year-old woman with dementia as a kind of prayer. "We search for the conversations that will bring her to the present."

Sister Esther was selected for the work because of her calm demeanor. Through her interactions with assisted living residents as well as the people she has encountered in volunteer work at the food bank, her former parish of Our Lady of Fatima, and her recent work at St. Joseph Family Center, Sister Esther frequently hears that she radiates peace.

It is a peace that she credits to some very difficult times. "I am in my resurrection time," she smiles, "after coming through a crucifixion time." She is referring to a physical and mental breakdown that led to a diagnosis of clinical depression in 1985. Even more, she is referring to the struggle to live with depression amidst members of her own monastic community who did not yet understand mental illness. "With depression and experiencing extreme rejection, I've learned a lot," she says, "and I've come back to a peaceful place."



Sister Esther in 2016 celebrating her Golden Jubilee with Sister Rose Marie Nutsch (also a Golden Jubilarian), Sister Sue Ellen Drexler (Silver Jubilarian), Prioress Sister Mary Forman, and Sister Clarissa Goeckner.

Her experience gives her a deep compassion for the homeless, who are often suffering from untreated mental illness. She also has a keen understanding of the near-homelessness

of the elderly, disabled, addicted, and even herself. In all of her work she has sought to serve by "being there and

loving them." Her ministries have also been inspired by values of Benedictine hospitality and the constant call to prayer. "Being Benedictine has taught me how to pray all the time."

Sister Esther has journeyed to wellness with the help of good therapists and doctors, friends that have included the Holy Names sisters in Spokane and the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia as well as sisters in her own St. Gertrude's community. She is active in three parish communities throughout the city and loves all the spiritual enrichment opportunities Spokane offers.

She was born in Gooding, Idaho, the fifth of seven children. "My parents were very oriented to service and community; they were wonderful role models." After the family moved to Rupert when she was in sixth grade, Esther encountered the sisters of St. Gertrude's during her catechism classes. "They made learning fun," recalls Sister Esther. She wanted to enter St. Gertrude's as a teenager but her father said no, allowing her to take more time to experience more of her life before making such a big decision. Soon after graduation the call returned. She was professed on August 6, 1966, at the age of 20. She celebrated her Golden Jubilee last year.

"I am excited and relieved I made it," she smiles. "I know more about what I am committing to than I did 50 years ago. Despite the challenges of monastic life, I am still willing to renew and keep going and serve the Lord with all my being. Whatever happens in the future, God is with me." ✕



sharing the love

Stories of Friends of St. Gertrude's



John and Joan Carley are donors who made a significant impact on the recent new WiFi network and computer project for St. Gertrude's. They learned about the project in last fall's appeal that explained how the Monastery's existing network and equipment dated back to the early days of the internet.

"I thought if they are still working with the original equipment, they are really going to need an updated system," explains John. "The sisters do a wonderful job of helping others. This will help them do their ministries."

Joan Carley is a Boise native who was educated by the sisters at St. Mary's and St. Theresa's Catholic Schools. Joan's parents actively supported the sisters. "My mom and dad became very close to the nuns. My mom would collect food from farmers' fruit stands and lead canning projects for the sisters — in actual cans, not jars." Her parents also bought a dining room set for the teaching sisters' Boise residence. The set is now the center of a meeting room at the Monastery. John was raised in Boise and became Catholic after he married Joan.

Sister Clarissa Goeckner was principal of St. Mary's when the Carley's children attended. "She is such a dear friend. The sisters really touch your heart," says Joan. "They taught our children."

John and Joan now have nine grandchildren. They split their time between homes in Boise and McCall. They are active at St. John's Cathedral, St. Paul's Catholic Student Center at Boise State University, and Our Lady of the Lake Parish in McCall. A retired president of Albertson's, John enjoys photography, the outdoors, travel, and fishing.

"We've always been impressed with their hard work," says John. "I thought if we can help them out a bit that's what we'll do." ❖

"Hope is an attitude of the heart which tells me God is present in our world," says Monsignor Andrew (Andy) Schumacher. "We must give hope to one another." The Benedictine sisters and Msgr. Andy have been in a relationship of sharing hope since he was a boy.

He was taught by the sisters and the Schumacher family would visit the convent on Sundays. His niece later joined the community — Sister Betty Schumacher. During his education, there were two sisters who were of special influence, Sister Augustine, his principal in high school, and Sister Gonzaga who was his Latin teacher. "Sister Gonzaga really influenced my vocation as a priest," he says.



Msgr. Andy was ordained in Rome on December 20, 1959. While there, he witnessed the election and coronation of Pope John XXIII, and the calling of the Second Vatican Council. He had a private audience with Pope John XXIII and met Padre Pio, both now canonized saints.

Msgr. Andy returned to the U.S. in 1960. He served at parishes throughout Idaho and was the first full-time chaplain at the University of Idaho. He also served as the rector of St. John's Cathedral in Boise. Sisters Cecile Marie Uhlorn, Angela Uhlorn, and Carol Ann Wassmuth worked with him as pastoral associates. Despite retiring in 2004, he is still active in ministry. He maintains contact with fellow priests in a support group, *Jesu Caritas*. The group meets at homes or parishes, including the Monastery of St. Gertrude, for prayer, scripture, and fellowship. It also provides an opportunity to keep in touch with the Monastery of St. Gertrude, which he supports as a donor.

"In more recent years the mission and lifestyle of the sisters of St. Gertrude has changed from a teaching mission to following more closely the Rule of St. Benedict, 'Ora et Labora' (Pray and Work). They are dedicated to prayer and working to build the Kingdom of God from here on the Camas Prairie. With their work for the protection of our environment, their promotion of human rights, and their concern for the poor, they are dedicating their lives to building a Kingdom of Justice, Peace, Love, and Mercy." ❖

spirituality

A Cave of Solitude



"And don't we all, with fierce hunger, crave a cave of solitude, a space of deep listening – full of quiet darkness and stars, until finally we hear a syllable of God echoing in the cave of our hearts?" ~ Macrina Wiederkehr



Whether it's the siren's call of technology, a complicated family schedule, or the multitasking required at work, our lives are filled with inner and outer noise.

Today's culture glorifies the sort of busyness that keeps us from listening to our own hearts and listening for God's voice.

Sometimes the soul needs a time of deep silence to quiet the mind, deepen the breathing and just listen. Spirit Center offers a cave of solitude and silence with the "Come to the Quiet" retreat. Situated at the base of a forested hill and looking out to a rolling prairie, the rural setting, coupled with the daily rhythm of Monastery life, lends itself to a gentle but certain quieting of the soul.

"The quiet and peace that just permeates the place is amazing," says retreatant Vicky, of Colfax, Wash.

"Come to the Quiet" retreatants spend a week in silence broken only by daily sessions with a spiritual director and a brief mid-week gathering. The entire Monastery community, from the sisters to the employees, supports the experience by keeping their own voices low and respecting the silence as they go about their work.

Although it is an organized retreat with up to 16 other participants, each retreatant's experience is unique. One person chooses to spend a day in front of the large lobby windows, watching the clouds and reflecting in her journal. Another person hikes up into the forest behind the Monastery to sit on a log and listen to the birds.

"It feeds my soul to reverence the silence, for in doing so, I'm connecting to the deepest parts of myself and to God," says Shelby, of Boise.

The retreat enjoys a faithful following. Several people choose to leave their noisy lives to come to either the winter or summer version every year. Like Shelby, they consider it a pivotal part of their personal and spiritual growth.

"Interrupting routine is vital to new life and finding the abundance Spirit desires for us," says Valerie, of Sandpoint. "Spiritual treasures are discovered in the quiet."

Beginning January 2018, the retreat will be offered solely as a week-long experience. A new silent week-end retreat, "A Sip of Silence," is offered August 11-13, 2017. This retreat is ideal for those unable to leave their lives for a whole week, and for those who don't feel quite ready for a week of silence.

Are you thirsting for silence? Are you craving a cave of solitude? ✕

*All creation holds its breath, listening within me,
Because, to hear you, I keep silent.
~ Rainer Maria Rilke*



A Sip of Silence

August 11-13, 2017

With Sr. Lillian Englert, OSB, and team. Suggested donation: \$220 single / \$170 each shared

**Register at Spirit-Center.org
or call 208-962-2000**

For other upcoming retreats see the enclosed brochure.



Living as a Monk in Everyday Life

A Q&A with facilitator Sister Teresa Jackson, OSB



"Living as a Monk in Everyday Life" is a nine-month Benedictine spirituality cohort program that begins with a week-long retreat October 2-8, 2017. Learn more and inquire at Spirit-Center.org.

What inspired you to create this program?

My primary inspiration has been seeing the number of lay people who feel very drawn to Benedictine spirituality but who don't have opportunities for in-depth, structured formation in what it means to live as Benedictines in the world. The "Living as a Monk in Everyday Life" cohort is an opportunity for like-minded people to journey together as they develop a monastic lifestyle in the midst of a society that doesn't understand this call.

How do you see people changed from this experience?

We just had a reunion for participants of this program. One thing I heard people say consistently was "it has changed my life." People find this program very challenging. It is hard work and requires looking deeply into your own "issues" as well as what it means to desire a deeper relationship with God. But for people who persevere, it is clear that they come away with new depth to their spiritual life. One past participant advised people who were considering this program: "Pack your bags because you are going on a wonderful journey. It will change your life." You will also meet some exceptional people to share your journey. An amazing bond and sense of community develop among the participants.

Who is this program ideal for?

This program is ideal for someone who has a sense of wanting *more* from their faith life. If you have a sense that simply believing and going to Church on Sunday isn't enough, if you have a hunger for more depth in your relationship with God, if you are willing to get to know yourself better and be more intentional in the practice of your faith, this program might be for you. It is a lot of work, it isn't easy, and takes a substantial commitment of time, but most people who are intentional about doing the work find that their lives are never the same. ✕

Meet a Mystic

The rooms in Spirit Center are named for famous mystics and monastics. Each Canticle features one of them.

Saint Basil the Great (330-379)

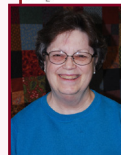
was a theologian who also had a vital and visionary grounding in ministry. He supported the Nicene Creed, was a famous preacher, and became bishop of Caesarea. He cared for the underprivileged, even giving away his inheritance to the poor. He built a large complex called the Basiliad which included a poorhouse, hospice, and hospital. He criticized the greed and corruption of public officials and worked to reform the clergy. He founded several monasteries and is considered the father of Eastern monasticism and an influencer of Saint Benedict. ✕



Just announced!

The Spirituality of Dr. Seuss

June 5-7 Yertle, Horton, and Gertrude



Discover again why you and your children enjoy the books of Dr. Seuss. Yertle the Turtle, Horton, and Gertrude McFuzz can challenge our adult selves. As we read their stories along with various Scripture passages,

we will explore Seuss' spirituality and ethical messages. There will be a mixture of teaching, discussion, quiet time for reflection, and prayer times with the community of St. Gertrude. Facilitator: Sr. Jeanette von Herrmann, OSB. Suggested donation: \$195 single / \$145 each shared

**Register at Spirit-Center.org
or call 208-962-2000**

vocations

Come and See Week, July 9-16

Sunday 7:00 p.m. to Sunday 1:30 p.m.

The Heart of the Call

Spend a week with the Benedictine Sisters:

- ~ Experience their life, prayer, and work.
- ~ Come to understand their charism.
- ~ See some of their ministries.
- ~ Learn the history of the community.
- ~ Hear first-hand vocation stories of sisters.
- ~ Enjoy leisure time in nature.

To learn more and reserve a space at these events, call Vocations Director Sister Bernadette Stang at 208-962-5003 or email vocations@stgertrudes.org. ✕



Vocation team members Sister Bernadette Stang and Sister Corinne Forsman with an image at the Historical Museum of sisters who have gone before.

...continued from page 1

A part of Divine Office is the silent pauses between psalms and the longer silence after the reading, which allow the listeners to reflect on the particular phrase or word that touches their hearts, in order to take it to heart and call it up throughout the day. In the Benedictine tradition, this process is called *meditatio*, that is, chewing on the word of God throughout the day that is part of *lectio divina*, which since the middle ages was understood as *lectio* — the reading of scripture, *meditatio* — pondering what one reads by memorizing it, *oratio* — prayer, and *contemplatio* — presence of the one praying to God. However, in ancient monasticism *lectio divina* was “the desire to allow oneself to be challenged and transformed by the fire of the Word of God,” in such a way that one embodied that word; in other words, the word of scripture became flesh in the way one lived it.**

During the month of January the sisters at St. Gertrude’s concentrated their *lectio* discussions on Wednesday evenings by sharing their insights on articles devoted to *lectio divina*. Then during Lent they could choose to offer their half-hour of *lectio* between 4:15 and 4:45 p.m. with the intention of sending peace out into our nation and the world, wherever peace is needed. In this

way, the fruit from engaging in *lectio* was intended to deepen in our own hearts the need for peace and to be in solidarity with so many peoples who need peace.

Our prayer board in the chapel hall is often filled with requests for prayer, most of them personal intentions for loved ones. Recently, we received a request from a colleague, Weldon Nisly, who asked for prayers for his peace-keeping mission in Iraq. Weldon and his companions will be engaged in the Christian Peacemaker Team working among the Kurdistan people from April 19 to June 7. Will you join us in praying for the Spirit to bring good fruits from their efforts? As I walk from my office to chapel several times a day, I often see our sisters, oblates, volunteers, employees, and friends stopping by the prayer board to read the many requests there and, no doubt, to offer prayer on behalf of so many people in need. Carrying these requests to chapel, when we pray the Divine Office, is our way of praying the psalms on behalf of the wider community of God’s people. ✕

*Demetrius Dumm, OSB, *Cherish Christ Above All: The Bible in the Rule of Benedict* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1996) 124-25.

**Armand Veilleux, “*Lectio Divina as school of prayer among the Fathers of the Desert*”; this is the translation of a talk given at the Centre Saint-Louis-François in Rome, in November 1995, p. 5.

peace and justice

Celebrating the Social Justice Scholarship

Lewis-Clark State College (LCSC) held a luncheon on Tuesday, April 11, to honor scholarship recipients and the donors who fund the scholarships. As donors of the St. Gertrude Social Justice Scholarship for social work students, members of the Monastery's Peace and Justice Committee were invited to participate.

Sister Carol Ann Wassmuth spoke about the intent of the scholarship and the other programs the Monastery supports. "Supporting those who will go on to support social justice in our world is an important part of what we would like to do. There are times when the best thing we can give one another is the assurance that somebody does care. We care and we believe in you."

Carissa Bentley, LCSC social work senior, who received the 2016 Social Justice Scholarship spoke about the impact of the scholarship on her education and her life. She discussed the meaning of social justice and her social justice project. The scholarship allowed her to intern at an orphanage in Costa Rica. "I was able to work with children who had been through difficult experiences," she said. "The experience helped me advance in my practice as a social worker." She further expressed her sincere gratitude to the Monastery for the scholarship.

The Monastery of St. Gertrude Social Justice Scholarship was created in 2012 at the suggestion of Sister Kim Marie Jordan, who graduated from the LCSC School of Social Work in 2013, completed her MSW at Boise State, and is now a social worker at St. Joseph's Medical Center.

Scholarship recipients must be social work majors and have a strong commitment to social justice. The scholarship requires recipients to engage in a social justice project the year they receive the scholarship and provide a report for the Social Justice Committee. The 2017-18 recipients are Samantha Helsley and Monique Stamper.

"We want to encourage students to approach social work from a broader perspective," says Sister Carol Ann. "To not just provide help with immediate advocacy but to promote looking at the bigger picture of systems and structures that create injustice." ❖



LCSC senior Carissa Bentley (center) a recent recipient of the Monastery of St. Gertrude Social Justice Scholarship for social work students committed to social justice, at the Lewis-Clark State College Scholarship Luncheon with members of the St. Gertrude's Peace and Justice Committee (from left) — Oblate Alyse Cadez, Sister Carol Ann Wassmuth, Sister Kim Marie Jordan, and Dr. Eleanor Downey.

Welcome New Oblates!



During the recent annual Oblate Discernment/Commitment Retreat weekend, March 31 - April 2, Paula Marano from Coeur d'Alene and Michael McCoy from Boise made oblations. Pictured from the left are Oblate Phyllis Rossi, Paula's mentor; Paula; Mike; Oblate Dawn Howell, Mike's mentor; and Oblate Debbie McCoy, Mike's wife.

Oblates are men and women, married or single, active in any Christian denomination, who closely associate themselves with the Monastery of St. Gertrude through an initiation process and formal oblation (promise). There are currently over eighty oblates throughout the Pacific Northwest. Learn more at StGertrudes.org. ❖

Recreating Sister Alfreda's Attic

Siamese twin piglets perfectly preserved from when they were stillborn on a local farm decades ago, a mounted golden eagle with wings outstretched, an antique trumpet. These types of artifacts comprised Sister Alfreda Elsensohn's emerging collection that she began to display in 1931 in the old St. Gertrude's Academy attic. So began the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude. A replica of the attic has just been completed as part of a five-year exhibit remodel plan.

"We recreated Sister Alfreda's attic museum experience as a way to creatively share the Museum's beginnings," explains CEO of External Ministries Mary Schmidt. "It was a mechanism for bringing together



Former Idaho State Historian and author Keith Petersen, Exhibit Specialist Mary Reed, and Krista Green at work in the attic replica.



The Museum remodel team: (left to right) Frank Halter, Sister Mary Geis, Mary Schmidt, Keith Petersen, Sister Joan Smith, Krista Green, Debra Graham, and Shirley Gehring. Not shown: Mary Reed, Calvin Bakie, Sister Carlotta Maria Fontes, and Theresa Henson.

many of the artifacts that she first collected and it provides a context for why we preserve these artifacts that at first might not appear to fit in a museum. In addition, it allows us to honor the woman who was one of our state's first historians and a leading author on the history of our area."

Historically, Benedictine monasteries have served as preservers and protectors of the arts, history, and culture. Mary Schmidt and the exhibit remodel team saw the need to create a more dynamic museum that expressed the Monastery values of reflection and learning. The new exhibits are meant to tell the stories behind the artifacts in such a way that people are able to truly learn from them.

This project has been supported by Museum donors and grants from the Idaho Humanities Council and Idaho State Historical Society. ✕

A Benefit for the Historical Museum:

Come to the 25th Annual
Raspberry Festival!

Sunday, August 6,
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Kids' Carnival, Fun Run & Walk, vintage sale, art show, delicious food, craft booths, chapel tours, Museum visits, music, and more!

Learn more and register for events at MyRaspberryFestival.org



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