

Fall 2019

# CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE

## Song of Creation: *compassion*

### A Message from the Prioress

by Sister Mary Forman

#### **"Be Compassionate Just as Your Father is Compassionate" (Luke 6:36)**

During last spring's Lenten and Easter seasons we sisters read, pondered, and reflected upon a book titled *Compassion*.<sup>1</sup> Although it was written in 1982, the themes are timely, given our current political and ecclesial climates. "Compassion acts" is the third line of the community vision statement. Let us unpack what that might mean.

Compassion is not easily understood or lived because of its associations with "a general kindness or tenderheartedness" as contrasted with its root meaning "to suffer with," i.e., "to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish" of another [4]. Often compassion in our culture is associated with being "naïve, romantic or...unrealistic" [5]. Moreover, compassion can be confused with pity. In the words of novelist Louise Penny,<sup>2</sup> these two concepts are "near enemies" of each other: "Compassion involves empathy. You see the stricken person as an equal. Pity doesn't. If you pity someone you feel superior...[Pity] looks like compassion, acts like compassion, but is actually [its] opposite. And as long as pity's in place there's not room for compassion. It destroys, squeezes out, the nobler emotions" [197-8].

1 Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, Henri J.M. Nouwen, *COMPASSION: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, Doubleday & Company, 1982). Pages from this work will be indicated in brackets.

2 Louise Penny, *The Cruellest Month: A Chief Inspector Gamache Novel* (New York: Minotaur Books, 2007).

On the other hand, biblical compassion translates two different Greek words. Σπλαγχνίζμαι [*splagchnizōmai*] means literally "to feel deep in the bowels," like a gut reaction, from which comes the sense to be moved to show mercy. Jesus' heart welled up with compassion [*splagchnizōmai*] when he encountered persons afflicted with disease of all kinds. The second word is οἰκτιρμός [*oiktirmós*] a variant of which is used in Luke 6:36. Jesus' directive in Luke's gospel, "Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate," comes at the end of his section on love of enemies (Lk 6:27-26) and before the section on not judging others (Lk 6:37-38). Thus "Jesus' teaching on the love of one's enemies (Lk 6:27-36)...has as its source of motivation God's graciousness and compassion for all humanity (Lk 6:35-36) and Jesus' teaching on the love of one's neighbor (Lk 6:37-42) that is characterized by forgiveness and generosity."<sup>3</sup>



This call to manifest God's capacity to be generous and forgive seems beyond our human capacity, particularly when hurts and suffering leave us overwhelmed and discouraged. I am reminded of Sr. Joan Mueller's insight

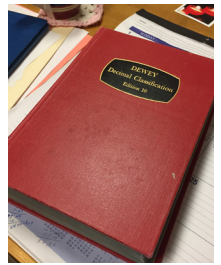
3 *New American Bible*, <http://uscbb.org/bible/luke/6>, FN to Luke 6:20-49.

*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.





## The Library is a Benedictine World of Prayer and Peace



German (as Swiss sisters who could read German have passed), more books on Idaho history, a decreased focus on overdue books along with a growing appreciation that sisters and guests are finding time to read, and moving the bulk of the fiction to a casual shelf on the fourth floor.

Sister Sue Ellen's passion for the library extends from her love of learning. She has been a teacher, catechist, and tutor. Education is a value shared by her family. "My Grandpa Benjamin Jansen would say 'education is the most valuable thing you can have. Nobody can take your education away from you.'"

Sister Sue Ellen made her First Monastic Profession on July 11, the Feast of St. Benedict, in 1991. Born in Idaho Falls, she is particularly inspired by the faith of her mother and grandmother. "They had great love for God and it showed." As she discerned her vocation, she was assisted by her friend Father Bill Taylor who guided her in asking the right questions. When she came to St. Gertrude's she found a resonance. "The sisters are so down-to-earth. They are human."

In addition to working in the library, she also serves in the Development Office, works on Monastery recycling, participates in the music ministry, and is a member of the Monastery music group, the Von Gertrude Ensemble. She can often be heard cantoring at prayer and Mass.

When Sister Sue Ellen Drexler began thinking about her vocation as a teen, the idea of a life centered in prayer seemed rather boring. Now she describes the experience of missing prayer as akin to missing a meal. "If I don't go to morning prayer, I feel weird...it's like not going to breakfast. There's something lacking if I don't go. It is compassion, love for life that draws us, that makes it so we desire lectio, prayer, relationship, service."

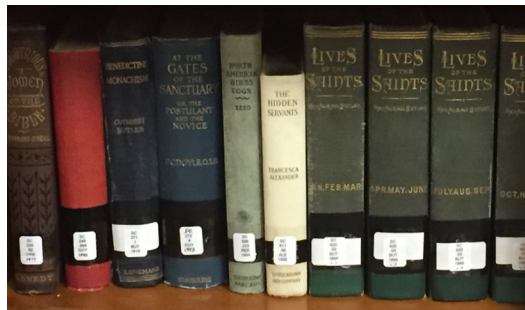
There has always been a library at the Monastery of St. Gertrude and Sister Sue Ellen Drexler is the librarian.

"Throughout their history Benedictines have always been a part of literary endeavors," she explains. In addition, Benedictines regard reading paired with silent contemplation or *lectio* as a form of prayer.

Sister Sue Ellen was first librarian from 1994 to 2000, in her early years of monastic profession. During that time she took classes in library science. Her second appointment as librarian began in 2015. In January 2016 she began working with consultant Sister Rebecca Abel of the Immaculate Conception Monastery in Ferdinand, Indiana, whose library experience extended as far as the American bishops' seminary in Rome. Over the course of six weeks, they reduced the collection by a third.

The team also created a digital catalog of the collection which is now comprised of approximately 6,800 books. Sister Sue Ellen moved the classical section into a small room behind her office and rearranged the bookshelves in the main library to make it easier to move through the stacks. She also added signs to the shelves to help people better find materials.

Other changes over the course of the library's history include less books in



Sister Sue Ellen finds joy in reading and loves being a part of sharing that with others. "When you get into a book, such as really getting into a novel, there is this feeling of changing realities. I emerge rested and peaceful. I get to make that available for others. It's also fun to see what people check out." ❖



# community



This summer we celebrated Chief Financial Officer Janis Lance's and kitchen staff Dolores Enneking's 33 years of employment at the Monastery. "I love the job diversity and that the people I work for show appreciation to me," Janis said. What excites her about the future of the Monastery is "there is a plan to move into the future." Dolores added, "I've been in Cottonwood all my life and I love this community of sisters."



On August 16, at Evening Prayer, sisters and guests honored Sister Maria Elena and her 75 years as a Benedictine sister.

Assistant Prioress Sister Mary Marge Goeckner led a community procession into the chapel and the singing of the community blessing song. The service concluded with a receiving line so that those present could personally share their gratitude. Now 92 years old, her ministries include teaching, 33-years as a missionary in Colombia, and a present prison ministry. Read more at [stgertrudes.org/blog](http://stgertrudes.org/blog).

Oblate Debbie McCoy attended the 2019 North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors Biennial Conference at St. Benedict Center in Schuyler, Nebraska. The theme was "Continuing the Sacred Tradition: Benedictine Spirituality Today and Tomorrow." Oblates explored ways to assist communities in keeping the light of the Benedictine charism alive in our world.



The second annual Oblates for the Future Symposium took place September 10-15 at St. Gertrude's with Benedictine oblates coming from as far away as Australia. Leaders and participants envisioned new possibilities for being Benedictine.



On September 3-5, former sisters gathered for a reunion. It was a wonderful time of sharing and reconnecting. The group took tours of the Historical Museum, Spirit Center, Inn, Monastery, and hillside — and heard presentations on future plans at St. Gertrude's and ways they are invited to engage.

Our endless summer of art included a reading by author and friend Susan Swetnam (July 14), a new series of day-long art classes, the Raspberry Festival Art Show, and performances by the Gonzaga University Concert Choir (Sept. 8), and Idaho County Orchestra (Sept. 21). In addition, we hosted six artists for month-

long residencies of shared inspiration and creativity. Learn more about it all at [stgertrudes.org](http://stgertrudes.org).



Raspberry Festival was our best yet. On August 4 we welcomed thousands of friends for our annual Historical Museum fundraiser. Here is our neighbor Vic Lustig and granddaughter enjoying the raspberries.



## The Gift of Retreat

by Krista Green, Spirit Center Manager

Whether it's for the first time or simply long overdue, practice compassion for yourself by coming to Spirit Center for a few days away from work, your phone, family obligations, or anything that prevents being at peace.

Mainstream culture encourages us to go-go-go and to keep busy. There are enrichment classes to take, book clubs to join, and kids' games to attend. Friends invite us for a weekend and our pastor asks us to lead a Bible study. And if there's time, how about making your own baby food, organizing a family reunion, and volunteering in your child's classroom? Being busy and productive equals success, they say. A full calendar means a full life, right?

But does that busyness allow nourishment of your inner self? Does being on the go enable you to hear God's voice in your life? Do back-to-back appointments and ball games help you feel centered and able to navigate life's challenges strongly? Probably not. The "noise" of constant activity forces us to exist in a sort of whirlwind, unable to access the inner stillness necessary to live fully, centered on our spiritual journey.

Is it time for you to step away from the busyness that has you running and turn instead toward a stillness that allows



**To arrange a private retreat call 208-962-2000.**

listening? What would happen if you stopped pushing yourself, even briefly, and treated yourself with compassion, giving yourself the gift of retreat?

A private retreat at Spirit Center is an opportunity to experience deep stillness, quiet, and rest. There are no demands on your time. No expectations for achievement.

Your time is truly your own. What would help you feel refreshed and renewed? You might spend your time praying in the chapel, browsing Spirit Center's library, playing in the art room, or taking a much-needed nap. Go for a walk up the wooded hillside and allow yourself to ease into a deeper awareness of the natural world. Let the smells and sounds of the forest fill your senses.

Spend time with a spiritual director to explore your relationship with God. In addition to meals in the refectory, the monastic community invites you to fall into their daily rhythm by joining them in the monastery chapel three times a day for either prayer or Mass.

How might this time in your life be different if you were to treat yourself with more compassion? Give yourself the gift of retreat at Spirit Center. ✕

### Upcoming Group Retreats ~ Learn more and register at [spirit-center.org](http://spirit-center.org).

#### **Silence the Christmas Noise: An Advent retreat**

December 1-18, 2019 Private retreat options  
Set aside a few days for calm, quiet Advent reflection this year. Prepare yourself for the true meaning of Christmas. Choose the retreat days that fit your schedule.



#### **Come to the Quiet**

January 24-31, 2020

Friday 7:00 pm to Friday 1:30 pm

Come away for a silent, individually-directed retreat with optional faith sharing, creative expression, body prayer and ritual. Relax in God's presence surrounded by natural beauty and supported by a praying community.

#### **Embracing the Artistic Call**

February 3-7, 2020 ~ initial retreat  
The program includes two retreats and guided work at home over a 12-week period. Open to those longing to live a creative life with intention.



#### **The Sacred Art of Traditional Iconography**

February 17-21, 2020

"Holy icons direct us toward the Divine." Fr. Damian Higgins is an iconographer whose works are featured around the world. Learn sacred Christian art using traditional egg tempera. No experience necessary.





# developments

## Compassion acts.

by Carrie Barton,  
Donor Relations  
Officer

I recently watched a documentary called *Tashi and the Monk*. It's the story of Lobsang Phuntsok, a former Tibetan monk who disrobed in 2006 and moved back to his native India. There he established Jhamtse Gatsal Children's Community in the Himalayan foothills.

As the child of a young, unmarried mother, Lobsang Phuntsok was told repeatedly that he was "the uninvited guest of this universe." He caused trouble in his small village until at age seven he was sent to a monastery. The monks treated him with patience and love. Eventually, he came to believe he was indeed a beloved child of God. Now he helps other "uninvited guests of the universe" find their true nature as beloved children. **Compassion acts.**

Gabor Maté is a physician whose compassion led him to leave a lucrative private practice to work at the Downtown Eastside Vancouver (B.C.) clinic treating hard-core drug addicts. His book, *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, describes the clinic's philosophy of non-judgmental, holistic treatment of their patients. Dr. Maté and his colleagues strive to honor the humanity of those in their care while offering the best possible health care. **Compassion acts.**

The sisters of the Monastery of St. Gertrude have dedicated their collective lives in the service of compassionate acts: establishing schools, building hospitals, creating a peaceful place for weary souls to rest. The community's daily prayer is the bedrock of the sisters' lives, supporting everything they do and lifting up the whole world. **Compassion acts.**

Lobsang Phuntsok, Dr. Gabor Maté, and the sisters of the Monastery of St. Gertrude have committed astounding acts of compassion. In contrast, actions as simple as making eye contact, listening without judgment, asking thoughtful questions, or offering a glass of water can connect us to another person. Sharing your time and resources with causes that align with your values is another way to show that you care. Committing acts of compassion can become a habit if we watch for opportunities. Accumulated, imagine the difference our compassionate acts, large and small, make in the lives of us all!

**Compassion acts.** How are you compassionate today? ✕

# arts

## Fall Art Challenge: Hearth

You are invited to join, and be inspired by, the Fall Art Challenge. Across five weeks we will engage with the theme of *Hearth*, its many possibilities and dimensions.



This fall's art challenge features Nancy Collins-Warner, writer, artist, and Creative Word Retreat facilitator. Beginning on October 27, you will receive a weekly email reflection/invitation for your art. On the first Sunday of Advent (December 1) we will gather at St. Gertrude's at 1:30 p.m. in the Multi-Purpose Room (main building) to share from the experience of tending our hearth and heart fires as we come into the season of deep quiet. Creative works from the Fall Art Challenge will be invited for display in the Monastery for the coming year.

Art Challenges are intended to be experienced at any level of engagement, whether you just read them and spend a few moments of reflection or are inspired to new creations and are able to share with the creative community at the end. There is no obligation, just invitation. To accept the challenge, email [artchallenge@stgertrudes.org](mailto:artchallenge@stgertrudes.org). ✕

### Leaf Lessons by Sister Meg Sass

Long ago  
tightly curled cocoons  
unwrapped into green  
leaves changing sunlight into energy  
for growth.

Lately  
work done,  
dressed in finery of gold and red  
blazing in the setting sun  
beauty astonishing  
calling for contemplation.

Now  
letting go  
of effort and plumage  
twirling at the whim of the wind  
falling, scuffled, crumbling,  
dying into Eternal life.

*Continued from page 1...*

that even Jesus, having been nailed to the cross, does not say, “I forgive them,” but “Father, forgive them” (Lk 23:34), giving us a model for us to ask for the grace of the One “who alone is able to forgive.”<sup>4</sup> If Jesus in the midst of his agony had to beg God to do the forgiving, who am I to think I can do this by myself? I must ask for the grace even to be willing to forgive. That willingness may take some time for my own heart to be healed of the pain, either my own or that inflicted on a loved one. That willingness is not so much a feeling as it is an act of calling on God to bring about the necessary compassion from which can flow mercy and forgiveness toward another.

When one reads the parallel verse to Luke 6:36 in Matthew 5:48, one encounters a different directive, “Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” The word for perfect in Greek is τελειος [teleios], a word rarely used in the gospels. This verse is composed of a fusion of two biblical texts and Hebrew words from the First Testament: Dt. 18:13 reads τᾱμιν [tamin], meaning “‘blameless’ instead of ‘perfect’” and qēdōšîm [qedosim] from Lev 19:2 meaning “holy.”<sup>5</sup> In Greek thought as indicated in Matthew’s verse, there is a call to conform “to the divine ideal,” whereas the Lukan verse “emphasizes covenant fidelity and steadfast love.”<sup>6</sup>

As a child the ideal of being perfectly behaved in church, school and elsewhere conjured up the struggle in perfectionism, without much room for being a vulnerable, human being subject to frailty and failure. Madeleine L’Engle’s commentary on the Matthean verse has been quite helpful to reading the verse with compassionate understanding.

What about the mandate to be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect? The word perfect comes from the Latin and means to do thoroughly. So, if we understand the word that way, we might say that it

means to be human, perfectly human, and perhaps that is what we are meant to understand by this command, which is on the surface a contradiction to Jesus’ emphasis that only his Father was good, only his Father was perfect. We human beings are to be human—to be perfectly human, not indefectible or impeccable or faultless or super human, but complete, right, with integrity undivided.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, compassion is a deep Christian act, one that takes years to be cultivated by the grace of the Divine One, who plants its seeds in our hearts, minds, wills, and behaviors. As the love of God grows in us, overcoming the weeds of destructive thoughts and attitudes, and nurturing the healing of areas of pain and suffering, so we are able to “suffer with” the pains of others without pity, naivety and avoidance. Let us pray for that grace:

O God of infinite compassion, your Son willingly died for us on a cross and cried out in his agony, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” He yielded his Spirit as surely as he surrendered even his own capacity to forgive others to you, the one alone who could forgive such a painful death and turn it into new life. Come visit the areas of pain in ourselves, in our loved ones, in all who suffer from abandonment, terror, terrible situations of violence and betrayal, separation, and deep anxieties, with your tender mercy and healing balm of love. May we trust that you hear and answer this prayer in your own timing and rhythm of compassionate healing, as we ask in Jesus’ loving name. Amen. ✕

<sup>7</sup> Madeleine L’Engle with Carole F. Chase, *Glimpses of Grace: Daily Thoughts and Reflections* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) 294-295.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Mueller, OSF, *Is Forgiveness Possible?* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) 39.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict T. Viviano, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, edited by Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1990) section 42:35, p. 644.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



### **Bookbinding and Book Repair**

With fall approaching, Sister Placida will soon devote time to one of her winter arts: repairing antique books and bookbinding. If you would like a book restored, give her a call at 208-962-5015.

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**Phone: 208-451-4321**

# *born into eternal life*

## In Memoriam: Sister Jeanette von Herrmann, OSB

**January 4, 1946 – June 6, 2019**

*"God is still in our midst and calling us by the Spirit to a life of faith."*

Sister Jeanette von Herrmann, OSB, was born into eternal life at 8:20 p.m. on June 6, 2019. She was 73 years old and had been a Benedictine sister for 38 years. Sister Jeanette will be remembered for her gift of hospitality to hosted groups at Spirit Center, her ability to relate to every member of the community, and deep love of Benedictine life.



Sister Jeanette was born Joanne to her parents Otto and Doris in San Francisco, California, on January 4, 1946. She grew up in San José, California, where she attended public elementary schools and Catholic high school. She attended Marymount Palos Verdes College for two years. She entered religious life at the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary on September 8, 1965, making First Profession on May 25, 1968, and Final Profession on September 8, 1973. Because of a strong desire to live monastic life, she transferred to Queen of Angels Monastery in Mt. Angel, Oregon, in June 1979; she had met the community while attending summer school at Mt. Angel Seminary, graduating with a master's degree in theology in 1979. At Queen of Angels she made Monastic Profession on August 15, 1981.

Sister Jeanette's ministries over the years include teaching elementary and high school and serving as director of admission at Marymount Palos Verdes College, pastoral associate at St. Joseph Parish in Cupertino, California, and director of religious education at St. Paul Parish in Silverton, Oregon. She also gave retreats at Shalom Prayer Center in Mt. Angel, Oregon. From 1987 to 1995, she was a graduate student in biblical studies at Catholic University, Washington, D.C., where she also served as department secretary. She was elected prioress of Queen of Angels Monastery in 1995 and served until 1999. In 1999, she went back to Washington, D.C., to write her dissertation on the Book of Esther and was awarded a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies/Old Testament in May 2004. When she returned to Queen of Angels in 2008, she

engaged in various ministries. In 2015 she served as oblate director and secretary/treasurer for Queen of Angels Monastery and its subsidiary corporations.

In September 2016 Sister Jeanette sought permission to begin her journey to transfer to the Monastery of St. Gertrude, Cottonwood, Idaho, where she prayed, lived, and worked until her untimely death. During her years at St. Gertrude's, she served as hostess to hosted groups at the Spirit Center, gave a popular retreat entitled "The Spirituality of Seuss," and assisted the Spirit Center team with spiritual direction and hospitality. She also served as chair of the LISTEN III Committee for revisions to St. Gertrude's constitutions.

For readers of *Spirit and Life*, she will be remembered for her monthly humorous and insightful articles. In the May-June 2019 issue she wrote on hope: "We can have faith and hope in who God is. We don't hope for things, events, weather, friends, and so many things that we think we want or need. We do hope for God, God's blessings of grace, God's life for us. It's not a what that we hope for, but a who that we hope in.....We may not see the One in whom we hope, but God is still in our midst and calling us by the Spirit to a life of faith" (5-6, 9). We trust that she sees that God, in whom she hoped, and is enjoying the blessings of eternal life with her parents and many friends, who went before her to God.

Sister Jeanette was especially present to the seniors on St. Gertrude's assisted living wing, spending time with them, taking them on shopping trips, and enjoying the antics of the second floor therapy pet "Stormy" the cat. On Thursday evenings she often joined the "Loosely Knit" group of sisters and oblates for knitting and crocheting and sharing together.

Sister Jeanette is survived by her two brothers Joseph and his wife Sandy of Sonora, California, and Jim and his wife Suzanne of Savannah, Georgia — and her monastic community at the Monastery of St. Gertrude. The Mass of Christian Burial was held July 22. Memorial gifts can be made to the Monastery of St. Gertrude. ✠



## Historical Museum Awarded \$25K Grant



*The five-year exhibit remodel project at the Historical Museum includes a Fascinating Lives exhibit that features Polly Bemis.*

The Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation, Inc., well known for supporting projects that strengthen Idaho's communities, has awarded the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude a \$25,000 grant that will be used to help complete a five-year exhibit remodel that began in 2015.

"Without the support from the Laura Moore Cunningham Foundation, Inc., we would not be able to conclude this project in 2020," said project director Mary Schmidt, who also wrote the grant proposal. "Their contribution will allow us to move forward in creating high-quality exhibits for the public."

The grant will be used toward new lighting and video monitoring systems as well as a children's area, illustrated map, and gallery signs. Completed exhibits so far include a history of the Monastery of St. Gertrude, a replica of Sister Alfreda Elsensohn's attic (where the Historical Museum began), local fascinating lives, Treasures Gallery, special collections, Nez Perce past and present, and Chinese and mining.

Three remaining exhibits to be completed will focus on agriculture, the pioneer immigrants, and household life. "The Museum is an economic asset to this region and educational resource for students who visit from neighboring schools throughout the year," said Schmidt. The anticipated completion date for the remodel is August 2020. Celebrations will be planned for October and November of 2020.

The mission of the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude is to preserve the rich heritage of the Monastery of St. Gertrude, Camas Prairie, Snake River, Salmon River, and surrounding areas. Learn more at [historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org](http://historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org). ✕

### 20th Annual Fall Lecture Series

**October 3** ~ Lin Tull Cannell,  
"Intermediary: William Craig Among the  
Nez Perce"

**October 10** ~ Cort Conley, "Salmon River  
Story"

**October 17** ~ Lyle Wirtanen, "Chinese in  
Idaho"

**October 24** ~ Keith Petersen  
"How Idaho Got that Weird Shape"

**Get details at our website:**  
[historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org](http://historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org)

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