

# CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE



## Gifts of the Spirit: *counsel*

### A Message from the Prioress

by Sister Mary Forman

#### Do All Things with Counsel [Sirach 32:24]

Greetings in the New Year 2020! The themes for the Canticle over the next year will focus on three gifts of the Holy Spirit, namely, counsel, fortitude, and fear (awe) of the Lord.

During the Christmas season we heard the titles for the Messiah, whose coming to save all peoples, were outlined in Isaiah 9:5-6a: "For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful," [NAB]. Christ is known as Wonder-Counselor, that is, he will exhibit "remarkable... wisdom and prudence."<sup>1</sup>

Several passages in the First and Second Testaments and speak to the counsel of God. For example Job 12:12-13, 20 speaks of the distinction between the wisdom of elders vis-à-vis that of God: "So with old age is wisdom, and with length of days understanding. With [God] are wisdom and might...counsel and understanding. ...[God] silences the trusted adviser, takes discretion from the elders." Job learned the hard way, after experiencing much adversity and loss, that he was incapable of grasping God's purposes when, at the end of his crying out to God for an explanation for his suffering, he admits: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be hindered. 'Who is this who obscures counsel with ignorance?' I have spoken but did not understand; things too marvelous for me, which

I did not know" [Job 42: 2-3, NAB]. Job had to learn that while he and his three friends had some degree of wisdom and knowledge, only God had the power to act according to divine wisdom and purpose, neither of which Job had the capacity to grasp because he (Job) was not God. Thus the counsel of God is not graspable by human understanding alone, without the grace of God to enlighten one.



The psalmist reinforces this awareness, "With your counsel you guide me, and at the end receive me with honor" [Ps 73:24, NAB]; and again, "I will instruct you and show you the way you should walk, give you counsel with my eye upon you" [Ps 32:8, NAB]. Proverbs 2:6-7 reinforces the promise of God: "For the LORD gives wisdom, from [whose] mouth come knowledge and understanding; [the Lord] has success in store for the upright, is the shield of those who walk honestly" [Prov 2:6-7, NAB]. This wisdom (counsel) is something humans grow into, according to Proverbs 19:20: "Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may eventually become wise" [NAB].

In the New Testament, the letter to the Ephesians states: "In God, according to the purpose of the one who

*Continued on page 6*

1 FN Is. 9:5 to NAB (1970: St. Joseph Edition).

#### 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.

## Going Beyond with Sister Teresa

**Do you have a longing for something more?** That's the question Sister Teresa often asks people through a variety of projects and programs in which she is engaged. It is also the question that prompted her toward religious life.

Sister Teresa Jackson grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area of California without any particular faith tradition. She joined a Baptist church while in college and remained a steady member of Baptist congregations through graduate school and into her early career. One day, though, "it wasn't enough anymore. I wanted to go deeper." Soon she came across a brochure for a summer course in "Catechetics, Liturgy, and Spirituality" and decided to enroll, even though the course was hosted at a Catholic school. After six weeks of staring open-jawed and amazed at the richness of sacramental theology, she was hooked. A couple of years and several more classes later, she attended her first Catholic Mass. This was the unknown thing for which she had been searching.

Shortly after entering the church through RCIA in 1992, Sister Teresa began having persistent thoughts about vocation and religious life. After participating in a "monastic living experience" at the Monastery, she knew that St. Gertrude's was her home. Several more visits later, she quit her job, said goodbye to friends, and moved to the Monastery for good.

Sister Teresa made First Profession in 2000 and began working with the retreat ministry. As part of an outreach program she travelled across Idaho, Washington, and Oregon facilitating retreats as well as organizing meaningful experiences for often overlooked groups – parish secretaries and women pastors, for example – at the Monastery. She began to co-coordinate the oblate community with Oblate Jeannette Kelley in 2006. In 2007-8, Sister Teresa earned her Certificate in Monastic Studies from St. John's University in Minnesota and returned to take on a new role as volunteer director and then vocations director from 2010 to 2017. In 2011 she became a certified spiritual director.

She believes Benedictine life is not just for sisters. In 2012 she began "Living as Monk in Everyday Life," a cohort program at Spirit Center that forms people from all walks of life in Benedictine values and monastic principles. "Some

people can have this mentality that they can just be passive recipients while the sisters are 'professional' religious. I want to help people recognize the calling of Benedictine life can be for everyone."

Sister Teresa's influence can also be seen at Spirit Center. Musing over Brian Swimme's new cosmology and the Monastery's outdoor Stations of the Cross, she wanted to create something that merged the two. The text of "Passion of the Earth" was the result. She then worked back-and-forth, long-distance, with artist Melanie Weidner. The resulting project combines poetry with fabric mandalas, in a custom-designed space.

Her ideas continue to help grow the presence of the arts at the Monastery, from the Art Challenges, art exhibits, and artist-in-residence program to the now-annual "I'll Fly Away" Gospel Bluegrass Concert where she makes a special appearance as Minnie Pearl. She also serves on St. Gertrude's Monastic Council and the Council of the Federation of St. Gertrude.

New projects include the Oblates for the Future Symposium that is going on its third year and draws Benedictine oblates from around the world. She is also overseeing a co-housing initiative that will invite lay women to live in Benedictine community alongside the sisters after a major renovation of the residence wing is completed in 2021.

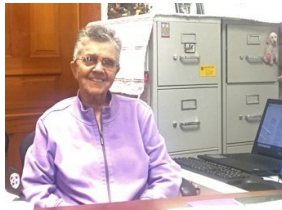
It is all driven by "the desire to help bring St. Gertrude's into a new future with a different way of understanding Benedictine life. I have been inspired by the people who come here and find this to be a place of great spiritual depth. I have intuitively responded to that and want to help them become more connected and find ways to live the same Rule of Benedict that I do. St. Gertrude's is more than sisters. It's a collaboration, all of us coming alongside in all the different ways God is calling. We're all in this together." ✕



**Listen to podcasts with Sister Teresa and others at [stgertrudes.org/podcasts](http://stgertrudes.org/podcasts). On the website you can also learn about the many programs mentioned in this story.**



# community



A newly refinished armoire at St. Luke's Hospital in Jerome bears a placard that reads "Sister Barbara's Closet." Inside are clothing and miscellaneous items for patients in need. The closet was inspired by Sister Barbara Jean Glodowski who served in Jerome as director of mission and spiritual care until she retired in 2017. Read the full story at [stgertrudes.org/blog](http://stgertrudes.org/blog).



We are so grateful to SOAR (Support Our Aging Religious) for a \$25,000 grant that resulted in new, energy efficient windows for our Sun Porch Room. Learn more about how the warm, light-filled room is blessing Sister Meg Sass and other sisters living on Second Floor at [stgertrudes.org/blog](http://stgertrudes.org/blog).

## OBLATES FOR THE FUTURE



HOME OF THE THE OBLATES FOR THE FUTURE SYMPOSIUM  
Monastery of St. Gertrude

Oblates for the Future now has its own logo! It is just one more step toward creating an intentional forum for Benedictine oblates around the world. The highlight is the week-long September Symposium that is now going on its third year. This is a period of significant change that monasteries of the Western Hemisphere are currently experiencing and requires creative responses to the impact that these changes will bring. Learn more at [stgertrudes.org](http://stgertrudes.org).

## We are Hiring!

We are seeking a full-time Business Manager. Qualified candidates will be looking for a position that is more than a job; it is a long-term commitment to using their gifts and skills for a ministry. The Business Manager plays a crucial role in the ministry of the Monastery. She/he is responsible for overseeing/accomplishing the day-to-day operations of the Monastery's Business Office. The qualifications for this position include a degree in business management / administration / accounting or equivalent experience and familiarity with accounting standards and practices and computer accounting (Quick Books preferred). To learn more about how to apply, visit [stgertrudes.org/jobs](http://stgertrudes.org/jobs).



January brought us two wonderful artists-in-residence: photographer Jonas Kulikauskas and mixed media artist Rachel Emenaker. We also have a new art show up on the theme of "Hearth" that was led by Nancy Collins-Warner.

## Upcoming Spirituality & the Arts Events

Easter Concert: The Valley Singers ~ April 19  
I'll Fly Away Gospel Bluegrass Concert ~ May 2  
An Evening with Idaho Writer-in-Residence  
Malia Collins ~ May 7  
Eaglesong Choir ~ May 16  
Biotzetik Basque Choir Mass and Concert ~ June 28  
Gonzaga Choir Mass and Concert ~ September 13

*Learn more at [stgertrudes.org](http://stgertrudes.org).*

Sister Placida Wemhoff is devoting 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.



## Corrections

The Fall 2019 Stewardship Report failed to acknowledge employee Donna Ross and Oblate Margaret Holland. We are so grateful for everyone who helps make St. Gertrude's possible and deeply apologize for any confusion these omissions may have caused.

## Hearing the Voice of Counsel

by Timothy Oberholzer, Hosted Groups

St. Benedict's Rule begins with the exhortation, "Listen carefully, ... with the ear of your heart." Every heart yearns to hear the Spirit's counsel. Hearing the Spirit's voice and receiving the gift of counsel requires intentionality and care. Spirit Center nurtures and supports all who enter this journey of the heart. Spirit Center offers space, inspiration, and accompaniment to you as you seek the Spirit's counsel.

A place apart benefits the listening heart. Busyness, noisiness, and ordinariness drown out the Spirit. A nurturing, quiet space, on the other hand, amplifies the Spirit's voice. Spirit Center's private rooms, warm lobby, cozy chapel, well-apportioned art studio, and modest library provide space to listen. Beyond Spirit Center, the Monastery chapel, the Stations of the Cross path, and other sacred spaces on the monastery grounds enhance the ear of the heart. Spirit Center provides you space to receive the Spirit's gift of counsel.

Fresh perspectives jumpstart a stagnant heart. Technology and screens depersonalize communication and desensitize the heart. Spirit Center awakens stifled hearts with diverse retreat offerings. "The Wisdom of the Celtic Saints," "The Sacred Art of Iconography," "A Sip of Silence," "Hearts on Fire," and many other programs give voice to the Spirit. Retreat facilitators guide open hearts in new and creative ways. Spirit Center inspires your receptive heart in the Spirit's counsel.



The clarity of counsel occasionally depends on more than space and inspiration. The Spirit speaks deep mysteries into life experiences. At times, the heart benefits from an extra set of ears. Spirit Center offers spiritual directors to assist your listening, receiving, and responding to the Spirit. A one-time conversation or regularly scheduled sessions invite another listening heart to join in your journey and to help you recognize the Spirit's counsel. Spirit Center accompanies your heart's walk.

Spirit Center provides the space, inspiration, and accompaniment to receive the Spirit's gift of counsel. The Spirit gives counsel to every heart. Every heart longs to hear this loving voice. Come, visit Spirit Center and listen carefully to the Spirit speaking in the depths of your heart. ✕

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

#### **Redefining Retirement: A Spiritual Practice, March 24-26, Tuesday, 7:00 pm to Thursday 1:30 pm**

Redefine the way you live into the second half of your life. Facilitator: Sr. Barbara Jean Glodowski, OSB.

Suggested donation: \$225 single / \$175 each shared



#### **Hearts on Fire: The Medieval Mystics and Their Spirituality, May 15-17, Friday 7:00 pm to Sunday 1:30 pm**

Through an introduction to mysticism and the writings of mystics, we will reflect on our own relationships with God. Facilitator: Prioress Mary Forman, OSB.

Suggested donation: \$225 single / \$175 each shared



#### **Herbal Wisdom for Today, June 11-14, Thursday 7:00 pm to Sunday 1:30 pm**

Learn how to identify and harvest herbs in order to make herbal teas, salve, and more. Tools and materials provided. Facilitator: Sr. Carlotta Maria Fontes, OSB. Suggested donation: \$265 single / \$215 each shared



#### **Come to the Quiet, June 19-26, Friday 7:00 pm to Friday 1:30 pm**

Come away for a silent, individually-directed retreat. Relax in God's presence surrounded by natural beauty and supported by a praying community. Facilitators: Spirituality Ministry team. Suggested donation: \$540 single





# care of the land

## Senior Forester Matt Engberg



*Left to right: Foresters Dave Luther and Matt Engberg with Sr. Carol Ann Wassmuth and a Tree Farm inspector.*

Benedictine tradition includes the reverent care for and use of all things, so that the earth can be a healthy and enduring home for all creatures. We steward 1,400 acres of beautiful land, which includes farm, grazing land, gardens, and orchards, as well as 1,000 acres of forest.

Sister Carol Ann Wassmuth is a master forest steward and oversees the forest with the help of Matt Engberg, a senior forester with Northwest Management, Inc. of Moscow, Idaho. "He is professional and hardworking," said Sr. Carol Ann. "We've become good friends."

Matt's first major project in the St. Gertrude's forest was in 2000 when he directed a harvest of dead and dying grand fir trees. The area was replanted with a diverse array of native species and most recently underwent its first thinning. "'I love those woods up there,'" he said. "We are working to make them healthier."

Matt also helps in planning and is currently assisting with updating the Monastery's 25 year-old forest management plan. "Everything in the first plan has been taken care of," he explained. "We will create new land management goals for the stands we've cleaned up and continue to get the right species in there. Also, some of the stand boundaries are no longer accurate."

Of course working alongside a Benedictine nun adds something special to a day in the forest. "She does give me a spiritual uplift — just the way she looks at everything," said Matt. "I am blessed to know her and I am amazed that she's taken time to learn what I have made a career out of." ✕

## Snow Clad Winter Trees

by Sister Meg Sass

Sharp pencil boughs  
Etch patterns on the grey winter skies  
Writing stark messages of truth unvarnished.  
This is the way, upwards and outwards,

Towards eternal Love and Truth, Justice and Peace.  
No protection from harsh wind  
No warmth or light to call forth the greening newness  
Yet persistent hope and Love dwell deep within.

Sharp pencil branches  
Etch patterns on the grey winter skies  
Writing stark messages of truth unvarnished  
This is the way, upwards and outwards,

Etch patterns on the grey winter skies  
Towards eternal Love and Truth, Justice and Peace  
This is the way, upwards and outwards  
No protection from harsh winds

Towards eternal Love and Truth, Justice and Peace  
No warmth or light to call forth the greening newness  
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No warmth or light to call for the greening newness  
Writing stark messages of truth unvarnished  
Yet persistent hope and Love dwell deep within  
Sharp pencil branches



*Photo by Sister Jeanette von Herrmann.*

*Continued from page 1...*

accomplishes all things according to the counsel of [God's] will, we who first hope in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of [God's] glory" [Ephesians 1:11-12, RSV].

How does one prepare for receptivity to this wisdom/counsel of God? In a Benedictine community, living under the Rule of Benedict, chapter 3, "Summoning the Members for Counsel," contains the greatest frequency of the word *concilium*, which can variously be translated as counsel, advice, judgment, consideration, and a gathering for consultation. The leader of the monastery in discerning important matters of the community does so with the counsel of the members [RB 3:2a]. Then the leader weighs the advice [RB 3.2b], in order to choose the best course of action. Benedict supplies a reason for seeking the counsel of all, because "the Lord often reveals what is better to the younger" (in rank or age, often the newest member), based on Matthew 11:25, 27, where the Lord reveals to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom. One notes that it is the Lord, source of wisdom, who makes known the better course, sometimes through the least likely member, at least according to human views.

Several warnings in RB 3 guard against all presumption that one's own opinion is best. No one is to presume to defend one's views obstinately [RB 3.4]; all are to follow the rule [RB 3.7a] and not deviate from it [RB 3.7b]; no one is to follow one's own will [RB 3.8] nor presume to contend with the leader defiantly [RB 3.9]. Presumption, along with murmuring (complaining), for Benedict is a key manifestation of arrogance, the opposite of humility. Even the leader must "do all things" realizing s/he "will have to render an account for all...judgments to God" [RB 3.11], even as s/he must follow the rule in all things [RB 3.7a].

Less important matters are discerned and decided based on "the counsel of the seniors," often understood as the

**Did you know?** The Monastery of St. Gertrude is part of the Federation of St. Gertrude that consists of 14 monasteries. The Federation president calls monasteries together for mutual enrichment and consultation. St. Gertrude's has its own monastic council: an elected and appointed consultative body that also serves as the board of directors for the Idaho Corporation of Benedictine Sisters, a non-profit 501c3. The prioress is also advised by the Leadership Team about Monastery matters. St. Gertrude's has sought consultation from organizations that serve religious communities.

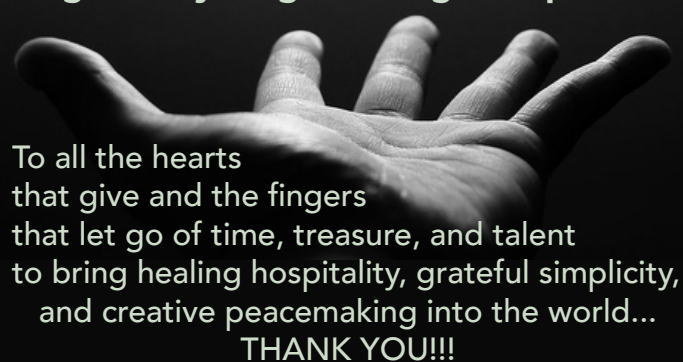
Council and/or leadership team and other consultative bodies in the community. Benedict closes chapter 3 with the words of Sirach 32:24: "Do all things with counsel and you will not repent after it is done" [RB 3.13]. Thus the process of consultation/advice-seeking/ weighed consideration is one based on biblical directives and divine guidance.

## How one seeks and receives the wisdom of others requires a keen listening to the voice of God...

So, what might such a process say to us in our families, work situations and social interactions? How one seeks and receives the wisdom of others requires a keen listening to the voice of God speaking in oneself and in others and, not infrequently, through the least expected members of the group, in society or workplace environment. Receiving the counsel, in order to weigh the better (or best) option requires discernment, an ability to lay the matter before God, whose Spirit can reveal the potential consequences of the choices before one. Discernment may take time, timing and trust to detect if a potential decision is of God or not, which, in turn may require more consultation and prayerful reflection.

When I was a new candidate in the monastery, I was excited to be included in the Chapter meeting of the sisters. I had not yet been told to wait to express my opinion on the matter under discussion, so I eagerly raised my hand and shared what I thought was the "right" way to look at the matter. Receiving no response, I again raised my hand and reiterated my opinion. Then an older Sister said to me, "Candidate Mary, we heard you the first time. It's time to hear what others have to say." It was then that I began to learn that listening is more important than defending one's opinion on a matter and not to presume that others had not heard me. Over the years I have been learning to recognize that one's idea(s) can be reframed by others in the room, in a way that is acceptable to the group or left aside because of the discerned listening in the community of those seeking the counsel of God together. ✕

**"It is the heart that does the giving; the fingers only let go." —Nigerian proverb**



To all the hearts  
that give and the fingers  
that let go of time, treasure, and talent  
to bring healing hospitality, grateful simplicity,  
and creative peacemaking into the world...  
**THANK YOU!!!**



# born into eternal life

In Memoriam: Sister Evangela Bossert, OSB

January 2, 1930 ~ December 16, 2019



Sister Evangela Bossert, OSB, was born into eternal life at 1:36 p.m. on December 16, 2019, in the presence of her sisters and caregivers at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho. She was 89 years old and had been a Benedictine sister for 56 years. She will be remembered for her teaching, writing, and spiritual guidance.

Sister Evangela was born to Earl and Hazel Hiatt Bossert on January 2, 1930, in Kansas City, Missouri. In college, while training to be an English teacher, she worked as an x-ray instructor and also took art classes. She became interested in becoming a sister during a college course in church history at Kansas City University. During a retreat, she confided to her retreat director, a Jesuit from Seattle University, that she wanted to become a Benedictine but did not want to stay in the Midwest, where all the Benedictine communities were quite large. He suggested St. Gertrude's. She came out on a train by herself and in 1963, at the age of 33, made her First Profession.

After spending the first part of her career teaching middle and high school English and History, she returned to Idaho State University for a master's degree in English and then a Ph.D. in English. She expressed her interest in transformational writing with her dissertation, "Primitive Consciousness in the Poetry of Gary Snyder." She became director of the Monastery's InnSpire sabbatical and spirituality program. She also taught Centering Prayer and began working with the Monastery's growing number of oblates, or lay members.

Sister Evangela's emphasis on the spiritual experience and contemplative prayer has been expressed through

her work as a teacher and writer. "Early Christianity rooted the soul in the heart," she has written. "The heart is the deep center of the self where God abides. God initiates awareness of this self in us and makes possible the conscious entry into God's presence."

This desire to more clearly align the spiritual with the heart led her to translate from Latin some of St. Gertrude's writings from the book, *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness* — Gertrude's heartfelt revelations of God's love. Sister Evangela had studied Latin throughout her education and wanted to translate the medieval mystic's writings in a way in which contemporary seekers could relate. She also added commentary and reflections. The result is *Gertrude of Helfta: Companion for the Millennium* and it is dedicated to the oblates of St. Gertrude's.

In spring of 2018 Sister Evangela published *The Golden Bean*, a Benedictine fairy tale and collection of poetry. She also spent a good deal of her later years on iconography. "You're painting for the spiritual experience and not to make a representational piece of art," she said.

Sister Evangela was preceded in death by her brother Earl Jr. "Buddy," twin brother Donald, and younger sister Christy Bossert. She is survived by her brother James Adam Bossert, several nieces and great nieces and nephews, and her Benedictine sisters. The Mass of Christian Burial was held on December 27, 2019. Memorial gifts can be made to the Monastery of St. Gertrude. ✕



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## Q & A: Museum Mentors

The Historical Museum at St. Gertrude is in the final phase of a five-year remodel project. Guiding in this effort have been husband-and-wife historians Keith Petersen and Mary Reed. Both are recipients of Idaho's Esto Perpetua Award for distinguished service to Idaho history. They have directed an array of history projects around the state. Mary Lorish Jahn is a graphic designer who advised on working with historical photographs and helped with many visual display elements.

### What were the Museum's strengths coming into this remodel project?

**Mary R.:** The museum has an impressive collection of artifacts and photographs. The dedicated and hardworking staff was open to making major changes. Having a skilled woodworker/carpenter like Calvin Bakie on the staff played an essential role in how we were able to undertake the renovations. Annual grants from the Idaho Humanities Council and Idaho State Historical Society provided continuing support, essential for a major renovation like this.

**Keith:** I was attracted by the Monastery story. The significant role the sisters have played in Idaho is, to me, one of the under-told stories of Idaho history. It is gratifying to hear Museum visitors now say they come away with an appreciation for this story of faith, determination, and hard work.

**Mary J.:** Over the years, I have appreciated the wealth of information and artifacts at the Museum. I especially appreciated being able to learn about Camas Prairie history and its fascinating characters.

### What were the challenges?

**Mary R.:** My challenge was beginning without a basic knowledge of the Monastery and Catholicism. I strongly felt it was vital to preserve the balance between history and these sensitivities.

**Keith:** We have re-done all the exhibits, creating new galleries — all while keeping the Museum open. That has been a challenge for both the staff and visitors. But visitors have been patient, and I think they have enjoyed the "work in progress" nature of the makeover.



**Mary J.:** What I appreciated about the Museum was also its biggest challenge. There were so many "things" but no theme or story to tie everything together. Keith Peterson, Mary Reed, project director Mary Schmidt, and the Museum team have done a fantastic job of creating a series of interconnected exhibits that tell compelling and engaging stories.

### What new experiences will Museum guests have once the exhibit is completed?

**Mary R.:** Visitors will not only learn the rich history of the Monastery and contributions of the sisters, but will learn the history and evolution of the Historical Museum. Other experiences will be to learn the history of remarkable people who lived in the region, as well as the history of the area.

**Keith:** The key word in "history" is "story." Too many museums are really not much more than antique stores: long lines of artifacts carefully arranged in exhibit cases. We've attempted to use St. Gertrude's artifacts to tell stories about how and why the sisters came here and what they did after they arrived; stories of fascinating characters — from Polly Bemis to Bill Wassmuth — who have called this area home; and stories of how and why people settled the region and the changes they brought to the land.

**Mary J.:** A huge transformation has been the addition of exhibits about the Monastery's history and the stories of the sisters. I've been especially touched by how everyday objects share the compelling stories of the sisters' strength, courage, and faith. ✕

Read a full version of this Q&A at [stgertrudes.org/blog](http://stgertrudes.org/blog).