

## Gifts of the Spirit: PIETY

### A Message from the Prioress Piety, the Final Gift of the Holy Spirit

by Sister Mary Forman

The gifts of the Holy Spirit have been the focus of our past Canticles. The final gift we will focus on is piety, from the Latin word *pietas*, which initially meant “responsibility,” “duty and devotion,” because it “implies...fidelity, reverence, obedience, and commitment.”<sup>1</sup> Piety in the Bible means godliness (*eusebia*) in the Greek New Testament and is akin to the Hebrew *hesed* in the First Testament, which means “steadfast loyalty and love” that characterizes the mutual obligations and responsibilities of covenant relationship to God and to others.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, understandings of piety have deteriorated through the centuries, such that calling someone pious sounds pejorative, that is, they are less than truly God-focused and more self-focused, so as to appear or

pretend to be something they do not live. The second letter of Peter relates the characteristics of true Christian piety, as follows:



May grace and peace be yours in abundance through knowledge of God and of Jesus, our Lord.<sup>3</sup> That divine power of his has freely bestowed on us everything necessary for a life of genuine piety, through knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. By virtue of them, he has bestowed on us the great and precious things he promised, so that through these you who have fled a world corrupted by evil desire might become sharers of the divine nature. This is reason enough for you to make every effort to undergird your faith with virtue, virtue with discernment, and your self-control with discernment; this self-control, in turn, should lead to perseverance, and perseverance to piety, and piety to care for your brother [and sister], and care for your brother [and sister] to love.  
[2 Peter 1:2-7, NAB]

In essence piety is love rooted in relationship to God through Jesus Christ, that is, sharing in the divine nature of God that overflows in care of one's fellow human

<sup>3</sup> Luma A. Khudher, “The Sermon and Authentic Piety,” *The Bible Today* 55.1 (January-February 2017) 24.

*Continued on page 6*

<sup>1</sup> Keith Barron, “Piety,” *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, edited by Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press, 1993) 742.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*





# sister story

## Being the Change: Sister Mary Marge Goeckner

Sister Mary Marge's first lesson about change came when she was 10 years-old and was alongside her father, a county assessor, on one of his trips to visit local properties. One of the families invited them in for a meal. Finding the conditions meager and dirty, the young Mary Marge refused to eat. Later, her father scolded her. "My father said, 'If you are going to behave that way, then that's the last time you can go with me.' I learned lessons in graciousness and would have many such lessons in changing from my parents."

Invitations to change continued after she entered St. Gertrude's in 1955. When she was a postulant, the sisters were not allowed to talk to new members. "I was inspired to enter community by my teachers who were sisters but now I couldn't talk to them. This was very difficult. I would be in trouble one day and would pack my bags to leave. Sister Angela Uhlorn (another postulant) would listen to my tears and talk me out of leaving. I would do the same for her."

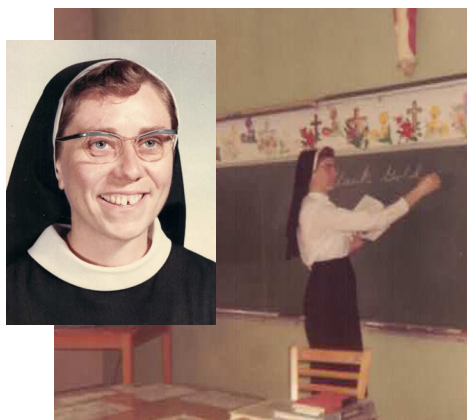
Her vocation would be severely tested when she was teaching at St. Paul's Elementary School in Nampa, Idaho. While watching the children on the playground one day, a second grader was hit in the chest by a baseball. The child died in Sister Mary Marge's arms. Healing would come slowly over the coming years. Father James, a speech teacher and Benedictine priest at St. Martin's where she was earning her teaching degree, invited Sister Mary Marge to counseling after she recounted the tragic experience for a class speech project. "He helped me tell my story and that was healing for me." Later, a trip to St. Peter's in Rome and an encounter with Michelangelo's Pietá also brought healing. "When I first saw the Pietá, I cried. Mary must have felt that way as Jesus died in her arms."

Sister Mary Marge's journey also includes continuous invitations to grow in leadership. After graduating from Seattle University Master's Program in 1976 she went to Rome to study Monastic Studies (taking classes in Italian). She was soon called back home in 1977 after she was elected prioress. She served as the community's leader until 1985 and was the second youngest prioress to ever serve in St. Gertrude's history, after the foundress, Mother Johanna Zumstein.

In 1981, Sisters Mary Marge, Annunciata, Aquinas, and Joan were in a terrible car accident on their way to the funeral of Sister Helen Marie's father. It was December. They lost control on the icy road and slid into a logging truck. Sister Annunciata was killed. Sister Mary Marge spent a year in rehab in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

In 1985-86 she took Clinical Pastoral Education and served as a chaplain in Spokane, Washington, at Holy Family Hospital for ten years and then at Sacred Heart Medical Center for ten years. In this time she earned a counseling degree during summer sessions in Zurich, Switzerland. "I survived cancer and a horrific car wreck that killed Sister Annunciata; I have no fear of death! These experiences helped me in my ministry of pastoral care to those dying and those who survive."

Sister Mary Marge is now the assistant prioress. She also served as assistant prioress for Sister Clarissa Goeckner's first term as prioress (2005-2011). "I understand the Rule of Benedict better now and continue to 'listen with the ear of my heart.' St. Gertrude's offers spiritual nourishment for people, a place to listen and be changed by God. I have had so many opportunities. Community has provided me with the opportunities to go when I could go. Community has also pushed me — and you need a push every now and then." ✕



Left: Sister Mary Marge teaching in Pocatello. Right: Serving as prioress. Below: An embroidery project.



## Monasticism, Arts, and Vocation

by Sister Teresa  
Jackson



A few years ago, if anyone had asked me, “what does art have to do with monasticism,” I probably would have pondered it for a split second and said, “uh... nothing?” And, I probably would not have been alone in that response. At first glance the question seems to be like comparing the proverbial apples and oranges, or as the British put it, chalk and cheese.

But fortunately, I then had the chance to get to know some artists from the many arts programs sponsored by Spirit Center. And, for the past few years, I’ve been privileged to coordinate our Artists-in-Residence Program, inviting artists to come for up to a month, live with the sisters, and have the time and space to simply create their art. After all this I would answer the question “what does art have to do with monasticism?” quite differently.

For a while I was a vocation director for the Monastery. That meant I would talk to women who were exploring whether they wanted to enter the Monastery to become a sister. Sometimes people would ask me “so why did you become a sister?” I would occasionally say “because I had to.” I quit saying it because too many people would interpret it to mean that I was forced somehow. But that wasn’t it at all. I suspect that the reality is that becoming a sister, a monastic, is like becoming an artist. It is something you have to do if you want to become who you truly are.

I’m not an artist but in being around the artists, those who come for artist residencies or participate in our various arts programs, I am struck by the deep, profound sense of call that artists seem to exude. They seem singularly focused, disciplined, and even driven to explore something beyond themselves that is expressed through their art.

Indeed, it feels like that sense of being compelled, called if you will, is the heart of what it means to be an artist. It’s a comparable experience to those of us who are monastics and feel compelled, called by the transcendent that we call God. It is more than simply wanting to do something, it is a strong sense that this

something that feels good or comfortable. To stretch the analogy even further, hobbyists may be to artists what Sunday Church goers are to monastics. The person who likes to knit in the evenings, take pictures when going on a trip, make elaborate doodles in margins is doing so for fun, relaxation, to feel good. Similarly, the person who shows up on Sunday morning, believes in God and tries to lead a good life, is often feeling good, comfortable, and reenergized. But for the artist or the monastic the motivation and experience is actually quite different. To practice art, to live the monastic life is to surrender to a calling, to go beyond the comfortable, the conventional, the easy. Monasticism and art stretch you, push you, take you beyond yourself.

Creating something new is the essence of both monasticism and art. In monastic life it is about the transformation of our essential selves, becoming the image of God we were created to be. Art is the tangible expression of something deeply personal that the artist feels compelled to create. This process of creation is not easy even if it is compelling. A popular quote erroneously attributed to Ernest Hemingway is: “There is nothing to writing. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and bleed.” In monastic life Benedict requires that newcomers stand outside the gates of the monastery for several days before they are even let in to test whether they are really called.

But what happens if you sit down and bleed or come into the monastery after having to wait at the gate? Perhaps the answer is the fulfillment that comes from answering a call that comes from beyond oneself, that only by answering that call can one truly become oneself. The way of the seeker, whether artist or monastic is not easy, creating something new, a new person, a new piece of art, is slow, painful, and even terrifying. But to do it is to feel a fulfillment, that out of the struggle something beyond our limited selves has been born. The second century theologian Irenaeus famously said: “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” Perhaps the monastic and the artist share the experience of knowing that through the struggle comes the feeling of being fully alive. ✕





# spirit center

## Being Who God Created You to Be

by Tim Oberholzer

Sam goes for a run most mornings but never competes in races. Is Sam a runner? Jamie composes poetry and crafts stories in a journal but never submits any works for publication. Is Jamie a writer? Pat goes to church nearly every Sunday and even reads the Bible from time to time. Is Pat holy?

Comparisons to Olympians, best-selling authors, or saints can make us see ourselves as inferior. God sees differently. God loves every step we take, every word we write, and every prayer we utter. God invites us out of the comparison trap and into perfect love that casts out fear. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond by loving God with every step, word, and prayer. This is the gift of piety and the pursuit of holiness.

Worldly messages playing on our insecurities swarm around us at home, work, play, and even at church. God's invitation to holiness offers a radical alternative. Standing wholly before God in the outpouring grace of the Holy Spirit, comparisons to others wash away. We become who we are before God. Freed from competition we are free for communion.

The Holy Spirit inspires our communion with both God and neighbor. We respond to love with love. In our thoughts, words, and deeds we manifest the image



of God that we are. We acknowledge our Creator and share in the creation. We become who God created us to be.

Sister Teresa recently summarized Spirit Center's mission as "helping people be who God created them to be." Spirit Center welcomes people of all beliefs into a place where personal holiness can blossom. The grounds of the Monastery of St. Gertrude offer peace and natural beauty far from the world's chaotic distortions. The daily prayers and Eucharist lift weary souls and open blind eyes and deaf ears to transcendent beauty. The spiritual directors share in the listening for the Spirit's promptings. The various retreats present opportunities for learning, renewal, and creative expression. In all these forms of hospitality, Spirit Center supports spiritual journeys and nurtures the inner transformation and deeper connection with the Creator that is the gift of piety.

Do you hunger for depth, meaning, or holiness? That is the gift of the Spirit at work in you. To learn more about how Spirit Center can help you respond to the Spirit's invitation and be who God created you to be, visit [spirit-center.org](http://spirit-center.org). ✠



**Tim Oberholzer** oversees Spirit Center and is a novice spiritual director. Tim spent five and a half years as a monk at New Melleray Abbey in Peosta, Iowa, before discerning out of monastic life and moving to Idaho to be closer to his parents. He earned a business degree from the University of Notre Dame, studied philosophy and theology at the University of St. Thomas, and currently participates in the Stewards of the Mystery spiritual direction training program. Tim is a remarried widower, an ultramarathon runner, and an avid reader.

## Hosting Your Group

Spirit Center is a 21,800 square foot, state-of-the-art retreat facility located on the beautifully secluded, historic Monastery of St. Gertrude. Constructed using multiple sustainable building techniques, Spirit Center was carefully engineered to leave as small an ecological footprint as possible.

Spirit Center was designed for flexibility and is able to accommodate your large or small group in an intimate and comfortable atmosphere. We also have the Farmhouse, a separate house for groups.

A galley kitchen is available and visitors are invited to the Monastery dining room for delicious home-cooked meals. Other amenities include a guest library, art studio, prayer chapel, outgoing mail service, and laundry room.

Spirit Center provides plenty of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. Guests are invited to explore the trails of the Monastery forest. The Clearwater, Snake, and Salmon rivers are just minutes away.

To discuss possibilities for your group retreat and learn about our Covid-19 safety protocols, call 208-962-2070 or fill out an online Group Inquiry Form at [stgertrudes.org/spirit-center-hosting-your-group](http://stgertrudes.org/spirit-center-hosting-your-group). ✕



*Benedictine Scholars from St. Martin's University explore the Monastery hill during a 2018 retreat. Above: Sister Carol Ann Wassmuth gives a talk on Benedictine values and forest stewardship.*

## ST. GERTRUDE'S L.I.V.E.

(Living in a Virtual Environment)

~ Online Monastic Studies, Spirituality, and Arts ~



Online programs continue! Visit [stgertrudes.org](http://stgertrudes.org).

**May 29 ~ Who Lives Here: Character Development and Storytelling** with Peter Chilson, 9 - 11 a.m. Pacific Time via Zoom

**June 5 ~ Discernment: Hearts Tuned to God** with Kathy McFaul, 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. Pacific Time, via Zoom

*"It has been a soul lifeline to me since the pandemic to have this connection to the Monastery community which continues to live out its mission of welcoming!"*

~ Debbie Haveman, Mt. Vernon, Washington

## Upcoming Retreats at Spirit Center:

**June 8-10 ~ Our Earth Through the Eyes of Faith**

**July 19-21 ~ Praying with Jesus**

**July 23-30 ~ Come to the Quiet**

**August 23-29 ~ Living as a Monk in Everyday Life: A Benedictine Cohort**

Flexible dates available for private retreats and hosted groups.

*Spirit Center is open as of May 2 with Covid safety protocols. Learn more at [www.spirit-center.org](http://www.spirit-center.org).*

**Spirit Center retreats at the Monastery of St. Gertrude, Cottonwood, Idaho**  
208-962-2000, [www.Spirit-Center.org](http://www.Spirit-Center.org)



## We Are Hiring !

Be a part of sharing Benedictine hospitality with the world! We are hiring an innkeeper and part-time Museum assistant. Read the full job descriptions and application instructions at [stgertrudes.org](http://stgertrudes.org). ✕





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beings. At heart, piety is dwelling in the free grace of God to be men and women of faith, whose lives are governed by discernment, so as to live virtuously in the strength of God's presence.

The contrast of pseudo-piety and the genuine variety is embodied in the Sermon on the Mount, where the piety of *hypocrites* (Greek for actors) is posed against its polar opposite—the righteousness of acting justly of the truly pious. The three practices of piety—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, which for Benedictines are the *bona opera* (good works) of Lent, are signs of “a heart devoted to God,” rather than to “public recognition” out of appearing righteous. Jesus in Matthew stresses the secret nature of these three acts of piety because God sees the heart and what motivates one's deeds by doing them not for outward show, so as to be seen as pious.

The fruit of living out of integrity of right relationship with God manifests in attitudes towards one's neighbor: not judging others by our own flawed standards, “balancing love with discernment” by paying attention to what is precious, persisting in prayer requests, trusting God to respond according to God's divine perspective, rather than our own, and the golden rule. <sup>4</sup>Thus true piety not only seeks the grace to draw closer to God and God's loving will for us, but also seeks the greater good of others. In essence piety is not what we make ourselves to be, but how the Holy Spirit empowers us, often without our knowing, to be our best self for others. This gift of becoming the piety (godliness) of the Divine Indwelling within and around us is a journey of a lifetime.

In the ancient monastic tradition pseudo-piety comes from the sin of vainglory, the step to arrogance, “the mother of all evils,” according to Abba Isaiah. Abba Isaiah said, ‘I think it is a great and honorable thing to defeat vainglory and make progress in the knowledge of God, for whoever falls into the hands of this wicked passion of vainglory alienates himself from peace and hardens his heart against the saints, and the end of all his evil ways is to fall into haughtiness, which is arrogance, the mother of all evils. As for you, faithful servant of Christ, keep your practices hidden, and with your heart's toil take care that you do not lose the reward that your practices will bring you because you are trying to please people. Whoever does something to show off for people will receive his reward in full, as the Lord said’. [Matthew 6:5]<sup>5</sup>

4 Ibid., 25.

5 Becoming Fire: Through the Year with the Desert Fathers and Mothers, edited by Tim Vivian, Cistercian Studies 225 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications/The Liturgical Press, 2008) “October 10,” p. 392.

I suspect that it is very difficult in our modern culture to practice the humility of not making what we do known, because there are so many outlets for boasting of our accomplishments and ways to let others know how much better we are than “those others.” It takes restraint and the grace of God to keep our loving actions hidden and knowledge of them to the God who sees our piety in secret and discerns its source. So we pray:

O God of Righteousness, steadfast loyalty and love, grant us your grace of true piety: When self-promotion tempts us to boast of our accomplishments, grant us humility. When seeking recognition as a sign of importance tempts us, grant us awareness of being a child of God. When thoughts and words of rash judgment tempt us to condemn others, grant us self-awareness of our own faults in need of healing. When the need for praise from others preoccupies our minds, grant us interior peace of heart. When pretense masks the desire for real connection, grant us opportunities to serve others with unassuming care. Lord, may our piety be grounded in your love for us and manifest in random, humble acts of kindness. Teach us by your own example how to serve others for their greater good and how to savor our relationship with you, Source of every good. In your loving name we pray. Amen ✠



Photos by Gen Heywood. Above: Sr. Carlotta Maria Fontes. Page 1 top: Srs. Rose Marie Nutsch, Sue Ellen Drexler, Claudia Rae Braun, and Carol Ann Wassmuth. Also, Fr. Meinrad Schallberger. At the podium: Sr. Mary Forman. Page 1, Lower left: Obl. Jeanette Kelley and Srs. Karen Martin, Kim Jordan, Teresa Jackson, Barbara Ann Bielenberg, and Corinne Forsman.

# mission advancement

## Sisters Move Into Their Remodeled Home

On April 22, the sisters moved back in after the major renovation of the residential wing. The evening before, Prioress Sister Mary Forman led the community in blessing the remodeled rooms. The project is on time and the results are beautiful. Thanks be to God!

Earlier this year, St. Gertrude's crossed the fundraising goal line for the \$2.3 million renovation project of the 72-year-old residential wing. On February 25, 2021, the prioress was notified that a grant proposal submitted the previous fall was approved by the board of directors of the Murdock Trust. The funds capped a robust fundraising initiative that began with major donors in 2018 and then, with 80% funded, went into a public phase of fundraising in July 2020. The public phase, that included mail and online appeals, raised funding to 95% of goal.

"We are deeply grateful to the Murdock Trust and to all of our donors who have supported this building remodel," said Sister Mary. "We are also grateful to Oblate Jo-Anne Zimmer, who has shepherded this project and to Arnzen Construction for their many hours of labor. We celebrate moving into our new bedrooms. Once the pandemic restrictions are totally lifted, we will have an Open House, so our donors can see the beautiful rooms and celebrate with us. God bless you all!"



*Blessing the remodeled spaces.*



Built in 1948, the Annex provided housing for sisters who mostly served in ministries away from home. Over seventy years later, the residential wing needed updated plumbing and electrical as well as asbestos abatement. The sisters' individual 9' x 14' rooms have been enlarged and feature private bathrooms. The renovations create an energy-efficient residence for those who live at the Monastery and coordinate ministries. The Benedictine community will welcome new vocations as well as Benedictine Cohousing Companions — and host sisters, volunteers, artists, and oblates in a contemporary home.

In late October, the sisters relocated to Spirit Center (the retreat center) that had already closed earlier in the year due to the pandemic. Construction work began in November 2020. Oblate Jo-Anne Zimmer was the project coordinator. She is a retired self-employed general contractor who spent her career in new construction and is a kitchen remodel specialist.

"After years of planning, design, and construction we are at completion! This has required the efforts of so many to make this possible," wrote Jo-Anne in a recent update. "We have gone from a 72-year-old building to a more modern space with the major highlights being private bathrooms, larger spaces, an asbestos-free environment, added insulation to the outside walls, updated plumbing and electrical, and more. It's a joy to watch this spring into completion!" ✕



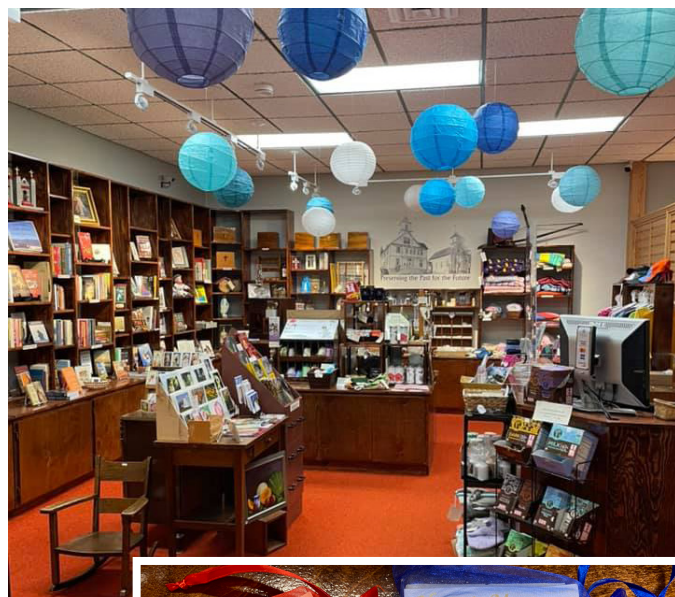


# welcome center

## Your First Monastery Stop: The Welcome Center!

Saint Benedict instructed us to receive all as Christ and one way we do that is to have a place to welcome guests: The Welcome Center. Here, you will be greeted by friendly staff and oriented to St. Gertrude's. You may choose to browse the Book and Gift Shop that features an array of handcrafted items including chapel replicas in the form of birdhouses as well as 3-D printed nightlights, Sister Carlotta's Nature's Gifts products, woodcrafts made by Calvin Bakie of the Maintenance Team, and more. You will also find books on religion and spirituality, and regional history and culture.

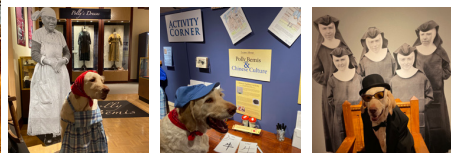
From there you can enter the Historical Museum to explore the history of the sisters and the surrounding area. The Welcome Center is open 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Call 208-962-2050 for more information. ✕



### Historical Museum at St. Gertrude

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[www.historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org](http://www.historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org)

## Monastery Hill

4 oz bar soap

a scented walk up the hill at the Monastery  
of St. Gertrude, Cottonwood, Idaho

Pure, herbal soap scented with pine.

Each expertly crafted Nature's Gifts Soap  
contains: olive, canola, palm and coconut  
oils; sodium hydroxide; water.

[www.StGertrudesGifts.org](http://www.StGertrudesGifts.org)



Sister Carlotta, creator of Nature's Gifts products, has created a new soap, "Monastery Hill" (featuring the scent of pine). Also, her Raspberry Lip Balm is now available year-round (not just at Raspberry Festival) in addition to Peppermint Lip Balm. You can purchase them in the Book & Gift Shop at the Welcome Center and online at [www.stgertrudes.org](http://www.stgertrudes.org).

