



Gifts of the Spirit:

WISDOM

Photo by Carlahn Gayda.

A Message from the Prioress

by Sister Mary Forman

The First Gift of the Holy Spirit is Wisdom

We continue our series on the gifts of the Holy Spirit in Isaiah 11:2-3 with the first gift — wisdom, which we will distinguish from knowledge, another spiritual gift. We begin with knowledge, which “in Hebrew... is to experience,” where to “‘know’ is equivalent to ...‘feel’” or to possess as in the sexual knowledge of one’s spouse (Gen 4:1).¹ Knowledge in the Bible can also mean to be skilled, as in the wise are “experienced in the art of living.”² In the Christian scriptures, to know means “to be willing to recognize, to accept” matters like commands by obeying them (Lk 19:12), “to accept the will of God” (Rom 2:18), “to know the grace of God or Jesus Christ” (Col 1:6) “and to acknowledge it (Gal 2:9).”³ All these notions are not so much the philosophical understanding of knowledge, that is, “an intellectual apprehension of reality.”⁴ In the Gospel of John “knowledge and love grow together,” where “the two naturally enrich each other,” such that knowledge is associated “with vision (Jn 14:7-9), emphasizing its experiential quality.”⁵ Thus, biblical knowledge is heart knowledge more than it is head knowledge because the heart is the center of the person’s psychic, intellectual and moral life.

Now we turn to wisdom, a vital reality of the spiritual life.⁶ Fundamentally, wisdom — *sophia* in Greek and *sapientia* in Latin from *sapere*, meaning “to taste, to savor” — is a universal reality, going beyond the boundaries of culture, religion and historical periods. In its beginnings, wisdom was international in character and enjoyed a wide exchange in wise sayings across the pluriform cultures of the ancient world. It was thought in ancient cultures “that wisdom could be learned only by instruction; it was the collective sum of experience, and the young...learned it by docile attention to ...elders or not at all.”⁷ Many times the wisdom of the sages was written down in dialogue form: for example, a person’s dialogue with one’s soul, or the dialogue between master and disciple, as exemplified by the *apophthegmata* of the desert tradition, or even Benedict’s prologue, of which we only have the master’s advice, with the disciple’s question: “How may I be saved?” being implied. A third example of dialogue is that of the personification of a human quality, like the dialogue of human misery shown in Job.⁸

The element, which the Israelites added to the understanding of wisdom from the many cultures

1 John L. McKenzie, Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc./London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1965) s.v. “Know, Knowledge,” 485.

2 Ibid., 486.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 485.

5 Ibid., 487.

6 Most of the following is taken from a conference, “Finding God by Listening,” given at St. Gertrude’s L.I.V.E., September 14, 2020.

7 McKenzie, s.v. “Wisdom, Wisdom Literature,” 930.

8 Ibid.

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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 Maria Elena Schaefer: Prayer = A Life of Adventure



"Prayer has always been present in my life," said Sister Maria Elena Schaefer. "Growing up we said prayers before meals and at night before going to bed. At certain times of the year, or for special needs, we prayed the Rosary together as a family."

Born on July 12, 1927, in South Dakota, she grew up with one sister and two brothers. Her father's work with the railroad would eventually bring the family to Nampa, Idaho. Her teachers in the 7th and 8th grades were Benedictine sisters and it was about that time she began to think she would like to become a sister.

After a visit to St. Gertrude's at the age 14, she became a postulant. She made her First Profession when she was barely 17 on August 15, 1944. She made her Final Profession when she was 21.

"In my formation at St. Gertrude's, I was introduced to the Divine Office, the Benedictine daily cycle of prayer. We learned lectio – Bible readings and reflection – as an important part of our day." Sister Maria Elena worked in the sacristy and taught the other postulants piano. Soon she began teaching elementary school in St. Maries and found she enjoyed being a teacher.

Sister Maria Elena (left) serving in Colombia.

Her life changed dramatically in 1964 when she became a missionary to Bogotá, Colombia. It was the beginning of a 33-year ministry in South America. Her years in Colombia included establishing schools, administering relief programs, ministering to drug addicts, improving housing opportunities, teaching, and running programs in growing parishes. Sister Maria Elena returned to Idaho in 1997 and resumed her ministries with vigor in the Boise area. She visited the sick, dying, grieving, shut-ins, and families.

She believes that including God in daily life became the most important thing she taught in religion classes in parishes and eventually prisons. Sister Maria Elena became involved in prison ministry when she learned that there was a need for bilingual people to work with inmates. On Sunday evenings she would travel with a fellow minister to the Idaho State Correctional Institution to lead prayer and singing for Sunday Eucharist. Then mid-week she would return to the prison to conduct Bible classes and Catholic faith studies. There were special sessions for any men who were asking to be baptized.

Now at 93 years old, Sister Maria Elena lives at home at the Monastery. Until Covid-19, she was still engaged in prison ministry to a local correctional institution.

"I have been so enriched praying with my family, coworkers, and my monastic community. Prayer of any kind makes our lives a real adventure with the Lord. It stretches our lives in ways that we could never have imagined. I shall always be grateful to the Lord for having taken me on this adventure." ✕



membership

Oblates Move Forward

by Oblate
Debbie McCoy

Looking to the future, the oblates of the Monastery of St. Gertrude have shifted from a traditional model of leadership and announced a new triad model of lay leadership for the oblate community. New oblate leaders are: Jane Somerton, lead coordinator; Barbara Wodynski, formation coordinator; and Debbie McCoy, administrative coordinator.

The team takes over leadership from Sister Teresa Jackson and Oblate Jeannette Kelley. As coordinators for almost fourteen years, Jeannette and Sister Teresa led the community through substantial growth and change. The entire community is grateful for their prayerful leadership and guidance over the years.

While the Covid-19 virus caused cancellation of all 2020 retreats and local/regional in-person meetings as well as closing of the Monastery to the public, the new team jumped in July 1 with energy and creativity to continue support and leadership for the widely disbursed community of lay Benedictines.

In October a group of oblates presented a very successful online retreat (via Zoom and St. Gertrude's L.I.V.E.) entitled "Creative Peacemaking in Difficult Conversations." More than 60 people registered for the retreat. Since July the new leadership team has met regularly via Zoom and instituted monthly representative council meetings to facilitate ongoing formation, support, and leadership in the community.



There are nine local area oblate communities spread throughout Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and Montana as well as a few oblates in California. Groups have been creatively navigating Covid-19 guidelines by meeting in local parks and backyards with masks and distancing as well as using online meetings to maintain community connections and support for one another.

Two new oblates and novices were welcomed into the community this summer during those local area meetings. While not the ritual normally celebrated in the beautiful St. Gertrude's chapel surrounded by their cenobitic and oblate sisters and brothers, it is still a step forward and we celebrate our new members.

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 nearly 100 oblates of the Monastery of St. Gertrude, living throughout the Pacific Northwest. To learn more about becoming an oblate of the Monastery of St. Gertrude, email oblates@stgertrudes.org. ✕

ST. GERTRUDE'S L.I.V.E. (Living in a Virtual Environment)

~ Online Monastic Studies, Spirituality, and Arts ~

Last summer we began online classes and retreats to meet the needs of the times. So far, over 1,200 people have participated in 25 programs. A participant said, "What an absolute gift it is to have St. Gertrude's virtual events during this difficult year."



Visit stgertrudes.org

Sisters are serving in the pandemic. Eight sisters have received Catholic Extension's *Sisters on the Frontlines* grants to help local families. Read a full feature at stgertrudes.org.

Right: Sisters Kim and Maria Elena get their first vaccine shots.



mission advancement

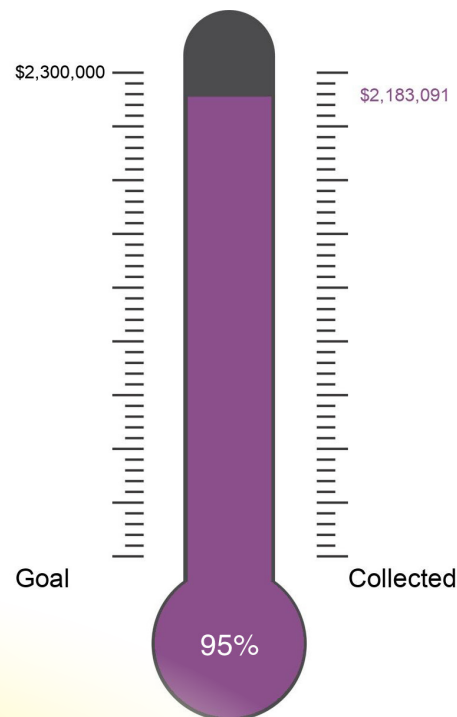
A New Century of Benedictine Life: Building Remodel Update

For all that has been – Thanks! To all that shall be – Yes! ~ Dag Hammarskjöld

To all those whose generous spirit blesses St. Gertrude's in countless ways, we are excited to share that we are 95% funded in our \$2.3 million goal for our Building Remodel campaign. You make it possible for us to say "Yes!" to the future of Benedictine life at St. Gertrude's.

Project Overview

To prepare for the future, we embarked on a major remodel of the residential wing of the Monastery in November 2020. Built in 1948, the Annex provided dormitory-style housing for sisters who mostly served in ministries away from home. Now, over seventy years later, the Annex is in need of updated plumbing and electrical as well as asbestos abatement. In addition, individual rooms will be enlarged and will feature private bathrooms. The renovations will create an energy-efficient residence for those who live at the Monastery and coordinate ministries, which (in a normal year) serve 20,000 guests, artists, and retreatants annually. With a deep commitment to the future of monastic life, according to the Rule of Benedict, we will welcome new vocations as well as Benedictine Cohousing Companions (see next page) — and host sisters, volunteers, artists, and oblates in a contemporary monastery home. ✝



Left: Craig Hood of the Maintenance Team helps out with the move on Oct. 23. Below left: Sr. Placida leads a moving crew. Right: Sr. Mary, the prioress, blesses Spirit Center after the sisters moved in. Below: The first phase was asbestos abatement. Other photos include scenes from the various stages of the remodel so far.



The Expansive Vision of Chief Financial Officer Janis Lance



"I have a variety of things to do; no two days are the same." That is how Janis Lance, the Monastery's chief financial officer, begins to describe her love of her work. She was hired over 34 years ago as a secretary to the prioress and to answer phones. She was moved part-time to the Business Office and eventually assumed the full-time responsibilities of CFO. Her work includes overseeing all the Monastery's financial functions as well as being involved in general administration. Over the years she has been involved in the implementation of new telephone and wi-fi systems and now the Building Remodel Campaign.

"I love accounting; I love a challenge; I am appreciated. The trust I can feel the sisters have in me makes it so much more than a job." Janis credits good mentors in finance. The high value she places on job happiness has led her to decline other opportunities.

Her grounded engagement has been the foundation to also help the community envision new possibilities for the future. A few years ago she saw a program on a cohousing project in England and shared it with Sister Teresa Jackson as an idea for St. Gertrude's. On June 11, 2018, the community voted to move forward with the cohousing initiative. The subsequent need to expand the dormitory-style rooms into apartments coincided with other updates the residential wing required, and a full-scale remodel project began.

"I am so happy to see this happen," she said. "Outside people bring a different depth and stretch us in healthy ways. Plus the space and private bathrooms will make it a lot more pleasant for the sisters." ✕

Co-Praying, Co-Living — Co-Housing



People have been living monastic life according to the Rule of St. Benedict for over 1,500 years. In the past most of those people took formal vows as monks or nuns. But today many people are looking for new ways to live Benedictine life. In our rapidly changing, unsettled times Benedictine spirituality offers a time-tested way to live a structured way of life seeking God above all. The emerging community of the Benedictine Cohousing Companions (BCC) offers women the chance to create a new form of monastic community in the midst of an existing women's monastery.

The Benedictine Cohousing Companions will be a group of single women who will commit to creating a new way to live Benedictine spirituality. They will not make vows or a life commitment but will covenant to explore how to live according to the Rule of St. Benedict. This new venture will require women who are adventurous, courageous, able to live in community and who desire to live a Benedictine life. Does that sound like you? ✕

To inquire about the next virtual info session on Benedictine Cohousing Companions, email Sister Teresa Jackson at membership@stgertrudes.org.

Call for Submissions:

Come to the Table: Recipes for Loving and Serving

A recipe is more than its ingredients, it's a blueprint for physical and spiritual nourishment. What dishes or concoctions have fed your spirit? Share with us a treasured recipe and its story. Along with your recipe feed us your poetry, nonfiction, or art. To read the full call visit stgertrudes.org/call or email creative@stgertrudes.org.

around them, was that of faith in Yahweh, who alone was considered truly wise. God's wisdom is exhibited in creation (according to Job 38-39). Moreover, divine wisdom consists of knowledge of how to do things and of the knowledge lying behind creation;⁹ and it appears "personified as a woman, born of God before all ages and active with God in the work of creation (Prov 8:22-30)."¹⁰ "Wisdom is also personified as a woman who gives instruction (Pr 8:1-21) and as the heavenly being who descends to dwell in Israel."¹¹

Although wisdom can be learned, ultimately it is a gift of the Holy One (Pr 2:6). "The beginning or essence of wisdom is the fear, or rather, awe of Yahweh, without which there is no true wisdom (Pr 1:7, 9:10; Job 28:28)....The peak of wisdom therefore is understanding of the deeds of Yahweh, especially [God's] judgments (Je 9:11; Ho 14:10)."¹² Most of the wisdom literature of the Jewish scriptures is concerned with the problems of the individual person and draws attention to the daily life of one who seeks unity and integrity to one's life, while avoiding "the disintegration of folly."¹³ Many wisdom sayings pose wisdom as opposite to folly, in the form of the "Two Ways."

In the Gospels, Jesus is "the wisdom of God" (Luke 11:49; 1 Cor 1:24) "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3) and who is portrayed as "the authoritative teacher of wisdom."¹⁴ In the epistles, God alone has true wisdom, which is too deep for [hu]man[s] to search out (Rm 11:33; 16:27) and is manifold (Eph 3:10). Ultimately for Paul, true Christian wisdom is Christ--Christ crucified (1 Cor 1:18, 22; 2:2), the wisdom of God considered by the world to be folly (1 Cor 1:24). Therefore, the wisdom of God in Christ is revelation, unattainable by human searching; it is a hidden wisdom with a secret purpose--the salvation of humankind, and made known by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:7-10).

Several years ago the prioress of my community at the house meeting one night gathered us together to pray for wisdom. She invited us to listen to the words attributed to Solomon and while we listened we were to allow our hearts to be moved to request one of the gifts of wisdom. She then invited us to ask God for that

attribute of wisdom, which God particularly desired each of us to receive. She prayed as follows:

7.7Therefore I prayed, and understanding was given me; I called upon God, and the spirit of wisdom came to me. 7.22 For in her is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, unique, manifold, subtle, mobile, clear, unpolluted, distinct, invulnerable, loving the good, keen, irresistible, 23beneficent, humane, steadfast, sure, free from anxiety, all-powerful, overseeing all, and penetrating through all spirits that are intelligent and pure and most subtle. [RSV Wisdom 7:7, 7:22-23]

After she read this passage from Wisdom and we each prayed for that gift of wisdom we felt God desired to bestow on us, she invited us to hold the memory of this prayer in our hearts for a month at least. We were not to tell anyone else what we had prayed for, but to proclaim the gift by how we lived our lives, in mindfulness of what we had been granted. In other words, we were to share the gift by our deeds and by our asking the Spirit to guide the unfolding of the gift. The gift was given to each one, not as an individual, but as a person. In the biblical tradition a "person" (in Hebrew *nephesh*) is a network of relationships, of connections, of delicate interactional dynamics with others. It was to be in the living of the gift that we would come to identify wisdom in our midst.

I invite you to pray over this passage and ask the Holy Spirit to visit you with an aspect of this gift of wisdom, which the Divine One desires you to receive and to experience its unfolding in your life. Happy New Year in the Holy Spirit! ✕



Amy Waddell, one of our assisted living caregivers, was able to catch this beautiful sunrise over the Camas Prairie in early November.

9 Ibid.

10 M. Basil Pennington, "Wisdom," p. 1042, in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book/The Liturgical Press, 1993).

11 McKenzie, pp. 930-931.

12 Ibid., 931.

13 Ibid.

14 Pennington, 1042.

Sister Bernadette Stang, OSB

August 15, 1935 ~ October 14, 2020



"If I can be in the stance of gratitude for all of life, I can't help but be filled with joy."

Sister Bernadette Stang, OSB, was born into eternal life at 9:52 p.m. on October 14, 2020, in the presence of her sisters and caregivers at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho. She was 85 years old and had been a Benedictine sister for 62 years. She will be remembered for her joy and spiritual guidance.

She was born in St. Martin, Minnesota, to Matthias and Amalia Stang on August 15, 1935. She made her First Profession in 1958. Her first ministry was teaching at Sacred Heart in Boise while completing her bachelor's degree over six summers' study at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. After ten years of teaching, she was called to be part of a team directing the training of catechists throughout the state of Idaho, building the foundations of the very first programs in the state. Later, she established an after-school outreach program for children and women at a migrant workers' camp in Caldwell. In 2006 she was honored for her service to farmworkers with a flag that had been flown over the U.S. Capitol and August 27, 2006 being declared in Caldwell as "Sister Bernadette Day."

Sister Bernadette was called home in 2006 to work with the Monastery's growing retreat ministry and later the vocations team. Everyone who knew her was touched by her joy. She said, "If I can be in the stance of gratitude for all of life, the good and the bad, and for life itself, then I can't help but be filled with joy."

Sister Bernadette is survived by her two sisters — Mary Ann Linz and Kathy Olmscheid; her three brothers — Harold (Marie) Stang, Jim (Donna) Stang, and Donnie (Shari) Stang; her sisters-in-law Alma Stang and Eileen Stang; numerous nieces and nephews; and her Benedictine sisters. The Rosary Vigil was held on November 3 and the Mass of Christian Burial was held on Wednesday, November 4. Services were live-streamed from the Monastery chapel. Memorial gifts can be made to the Monastery of St. Gertrude. ✠

Sister Joan Smith, OSB

May 30, 1929 ~ October 17, 2020



"That in all things God may be glorified."

Sister Joan Smith, OSB, was born into eternal life at 6:41 a.m. on October 17, 2020, in the presence of her sisters and caregivers at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho. She was 91 years old and had been a Benedictine sister for 72 years. She will be remembered for her dedicated service to the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude, the Monastery's development endeavors, and education.

Sister Joan was born in St. Maries, Idaho, to Elmer Smith and Marjorie Caswell Smith on May 30, 1929. She knew as a first grader that she wanted to become a Benedictine sister. She attended St. Gertrude's Academy on a scholarship and became a novice the summer after graduation. She made First Profession the following year on August 16, 1948.

She taught school in various towns while finishing her education. Then she taught at St. Gertrude's Academy until it closed in 1970. She became secretary to the prioress and soon took the opportunity to spend two years to study theology. More recently, she wrote project grants for the Monastery and helped make the Grotto Garden, a memorial place for the Monastery's major benefactors, become a reality. She also served at the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude, managing the extensive collection that celebrates the history of the Camas Prairie.

"As I have grown older," she wrote. "I know that all of these life experiences have brought me to the person I am today. As the Benedictine motto says: 'That in all things God may be glorified.'"

Sister Joan is survived by her sister Noreen Haler, nieces and nephews, and her Benedictine sisters. The Rosary Vigil was held on November 11 and the Mass of Christian Burial was held on November 12. Services were live-streamed from the Monastery chapel. Memorial gifts can be made to the Monastery of St. Gertrude. ✠



New Manager Brings New Ideas

Carla (Nuxoll) Wilkins became the new manager of the Historical Museum, Welcome Center, and Gift Shop last November. Prior to that she was the Grangeville Outreach Coordinator for Lewis Clark State College for nine years. In this interview she describes her vision for the future of the Historical Museum.

What are your connections to St. Gertrude's?

The sisters and Monastery have always been part of my life. I was taught by them both in Greencreek and Cottonwood, I spent time with them at St. Mary's Hospital over the thirty years my mom worked as a nurse there, I graduated from the high school the sisters built, and Sister Theresa Dvorak taught my children at Sts. Peter & Paul School in Grangeville. I also had two great aunts at the Monastery: Sister Ildephonse Nuxoll and Sister Andrea Koepl. When the job became available, it felt like a natural fit.

What excites you about this position?

The Museum is bright, clean, spacious, has been beautifully curated by professionals — and it shows! Not just a collection of artifacts, it is arranged to tell the stories of the area. The sisters have been diligent about preserving this history and it is a joy to be part of that. I learn something interesting every single day and I don't see that ending. It is a pleasure to work in an environment where kindness is a core value.

What are your goals for the Museum and Gift Shop?

This is a place sharing our community stories and I would like to have an army of volunteers to help



To better tell the stories of our region, an extensive five-year remodel of the exhibits (including a kids' section) was just completed.

WE ARE OPEN!

Visit the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude:
Monday — Saturday, 9 a.m. — 4:30 p.m.
INFO: historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org
208-962-2054



articulate them. I would like to have docents to give personalized tours, artists to restore frames and lend artistic touches elsewhere, teachers to plan and execute hands-on exhibits for children, woodworkers to build custom items for the Gift Shop, and volunteers to staff the Gift Shop and answer questions.

I would like more accessibility for children and to those with sight issues. I am recording 60-second audio clips of the stories and embedding them in QR codes. Visitors use their smart phones to scan the code and a link pops up that plays an audio clip of the story.

I would like the Gift Shop to carry more religious items as well as unusual and handmade items from the Prairie — things you can't find on Amazon. The Museum and Gift Shop will be a must-see destination for guests who are visiting the area.

What is your favorite part of the Museum?

My favorite are the stories expressed in the exhibits. Right now I am captivated by the story of the original sisters: how they were cloistered in Switzerland with the government interfering to the point of not allowing them to elect a new abbess or take in new novices. They decided to send three sisters to Oregon. These sisters — completely sheltered from the outside world — cross an ocean and then a continent. There are fascinating details of that story: the Jesuits had already been kicked out of Switzerland, one of the sisters chosen to go wept at the thought of leaving, and how Rome had to give the three dispensations to leave the cloistered convent. Then once they got to Oregon, they were joined by girls as young as 15 who traveled alone from Switzerland and Germany. The stories in every exhibit are interesting. ✕