

CANTICLE OF ST GERTRUDE



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The Many Forms of Mission

More than 40 years ago, Dan Aykroyd uttered the immortal line, “We’re on a mission from God.”

Aykroyd was portraying Elwood Blues who, with his brother Jake (John Belushi), had been charged to collect enough money to pay the taxes on the orphanage where they grew up.

The way this pair went about the task in *The Blues Brothers* wasn’t quite lawful - or edifying - but the music was great and the audience enjoyed lots of laughs.

All these years later, it still provides a marvelous example of how many different forms of “mission” there are.

The Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude - along with many vowed religious communities and non-profit organizations - has a “Mission Statement,” which is defined in the Oxford Dictionary as “a formal summary of the aims and values” of an organization.

An excerpt from the CBL Mission Statement - “Healing Hospitality, Grateful Simplicity, Creative Peacemaking” - is posted in every office and building on the monastery grounds. But what, exactly, does it mean?

First, let’s look at other ideas of mission.

In California, during the late 18th century, 21 missions were founded by the Franciscans, traveling northward from Mexico with Spanish soldiers. Located approximately 30 miles apart in coastal areas, one purpose of these structures was to provide shelter for travelers. Another involved educating and evangelizing the Indigenous peoples, the means of which has been deemed brutal and disrespectful of the native cultures.

These missions were complexes featuring workshops, housing and churches, designed to create a community of faith, and on a practical level. Some of them - such as Mission San Luis Rey in Oceanside, and Mission San Juan Capistrano - remain open today, reminders of the past via their museums, and hopeful for the future given their vibrant, multi-cultural parishes.

In the United States - and elsewhere around the globe - there are “mission dioceses.” In this country, the designation signifies “these dioceses lack the resources to provide basic pastoral ministry to their populations,” according to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website. Having a limited number of priests, traveling hundreds of miles on a weekend to celebrate the Eucharist in remote parishes is not uncommon. Often, too, many of the parishioners live in severe poverty.

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From the Prioress

The World Needs Benedict Now More than Ever: Humility

A long time ago I saw a cartoon. One character says to another, “I understand you’re writing a book about theology, I hope you have a good title.” The second character responds, “I have the perfect title: ‘Has it ever occurred to you that you might be wrong?’”

Not many of us have or will write a book on theology, but it would seem like a very good idea if we all took the book title mentioned above as our mantra in these divisive days. How open are we to considering the reality that we personally might be wrong? Most of us seem more than willing to explain how wrong “those” people are, but can we admit that perhaps we don’t have all the answers?

This kind of admission that we don’t know it all is an essential part of the Benedictine value of humility. Humility is *not* humiliation. Humility is simply letting go of the powerful grip of our self-righteousness, our conviction that we are right, and others are wrong. Humility is admitting that we aren’t in total control of our own lives but rather we are dependent on God for everything in our life. Humility means recognizing that most of us tend to (unconsciously) think that we are the center of the universe at the same time we’re doing the hard work of dethroning ourselves from that position!

What happens when we truly become humble? Benedict devotes the longest chapter of his Rule (his guidebook for a life focused on God) to the image of climbing a ladder of humility. He says that when we dethrone ourselves from the center of the universe (my very liberal translation!!) we ascend the ladder of humility. When we continue clinging to our self-righteousness, our entitlement, our assumption that we are always right (another very liberal translation), we descend the ladder of humility.

There is, then, a beautiful image for what it means to come to the top of the ladder of humility.



Benedict says: “Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, the monk will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear (1 John 4:18).” [RB 7:67] What an amazing image. Can you imagine what it would be like to be so enfolded in God’s love that you no longer operate from fear? The tremendous divisiveness that seems to have overtaken our country and the world seems to be largely rooted in deep seated, often unconscious fear.

If we’re all perfectly honest we often act - and react - out of all kinds of fear. But Benedict is saying, as we become more humble, less focused on ourselves and our certainty that we are right, then we slowly create room for God’s love and drive out the fear that has motivated us.

With the help of God and community, remembering that we are a community even when we disagree, may we all come to the top of the ladder of humility and know the transforming love of God.

Sr. Teresa Jackson OSB

Sr. Teresa Jackson OSB
Prioress

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The International Union of Superiors General (UISG) included for a recent program on aging women religious, “Mission, Jesus’ mission, is the never-ending story of our lives.” As participants gathered via Zoom to explore how the life-span of people has extended in many parts of the world by 30 years during the last century, they considered how they are being invited to focus on reimagining their call to mission, and “the growing body of interest in the importance of pre-tirement and encore ministries,” while aligning the desire for mission with the various stages of life.

Not to be ignored is the mission promoted by secular corporations, usually involving set goals to provide a service or commodity to the public, while reaping substantial monetary profits for the executives and the stockholders (often at the expense of the lower level employees, who must deal with low wages and occasionally poor working conditions with few benefits).

So, with mission referring to a place, a territory, a lifestyle, or a profitable goal, how does that impact the Center for Benedictine Life’s mission statement?

When looking at the history of the Monastery of St. Gertrude from decades past, being on “mission” referred to those Sisters who lived away from the monastery - usually during the school year - as teachers in schools throughout the Pacific Northwest. Each summer, they would “come home” from mission, for retreat, to study, and to reunite with the others in the community. (This included those who ministered as nurses, though their time in Cottonwood would often be shorter.)

Before they departed, the Sisters would be “commissioned” - or co-missioned - receiving their ministry assignments for the coming year. Being thus sent on mission, they were tasked with sharing their Benedictine spirituality with those they encountered while away from the monastery.

With most of the Sisters currently living at the Center for Benedictine Life, the mission of the entire community - including Oblates, Benedictine Cohousing members, employees and volunteers - is to embody the mission of healing hospitality by welcoming all who seek

to refresh themselves with a visit, a retreat, or a stay at the Inn.

Grateful simplicity blends gratitude for all that has been gifted to the community, with an existence that uses no more of our precious resources than required to live. This is expressed through prayerful and practical stewardship of the land which the monastery occupies and all the necessities held as sacred, as stated in the Rule of St. Benedict. In this troubled world, the CBL endeavors to be a means of creative peacemaking, emulating the example of Jesus, who treated all with respect and love.

During the Community Day gathering on June 21 this year, where the Sisters, Oblates, employees, BCC members and board members came together at Spirit Center, Sister Teresa summarized what has been a pioneering mission. “We’re trying new things, we’re taking risks, we’re doing it together, because it’s who we are, it’s who we’ve always been,” she said. “We will continue because *all of us* are working together to share this place, our faith, our values, our prayer with a hurting world that needs what we have to offer. “

As we continue on this mission, we extend an invitation to all: join us in bringing Benedictine values to a world that needs St. Benedict now more than ever.

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this Autumn*

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Community Day...



While the Sisters gathered for their annual “June Days” from June 20-23, a new feature was added to this tradition: the entire Center for Benedictine Life community - Sisters, Oblates, Benedictine Cohousing members, employees and board members - gathering for “Community Day” on June 21.

With the theme, “Breaking New Ground,” each participant picked a heart-shaped shovel to determine their table assignment, then heard reports with updates and plans for the future, as well as joining in group discussions and sharing.



On Sunday, as “June Days” concluded, each Sister was presented with a cup of soil with newly planted seeds from Sister Teresa at the “missioning” ceremony during Mass, along with a special blessing, as Sister Carol Ann Wassmuth received (above).



Above: CBL employee Amanda Cronan (right) reads her table’s statement on what the CBL means to them, observed by facilitator Sister Betty Schumacher.

...Commitment and Jubilee!

On Community Day, June 21, Chris Roberts of Boise, Idaho, made a one-year commitment to the Benedictine Cohousing Community during mid-day prayer. Chris has been living at the monastery - on the renovated fifth floor - since early 2023, discerning this step in becoming a member of the CBL community.

After she read her statement of commitment, Sister Teresa Jackson, prioress, presented her with a Benedictine medal, though the chain got tangled, prompting humorous comparisons that Chris “will be tied to us” in “great bonds of love” (while having a chance to play “cat’s cradle”) as Sister Teresa worked the links free.



On June 24, Sister Mary Frances Kluss celebrated her 50th jubilee of professing vows of obedience, stability and fidelity to the monastic way of life. Many members of her family were in attendance, including her four siblings (photo, left center).

During the special Mass, Sister Mary Frances renewed her profession, then sang the “Suscipe” before the altar - “Receive me, O Lord, as you have promised, that I may live, and disappoint me not in my hope.”

Congratulations, Sister!

St. Benedict and Systems Thinking

By Jane Somerton, ObISB

Have you ever considered that St. Benedict of Nursia was a genius? Given the correlations between our modern understanding of systems theory - also known as systems thinking - and The Rule of St Benedict (RB) (written in Latin by Benedict in c.530) I would say he qualifies!

Let me start with the definition of a system:

A system is an orderly grouping of interdependent components linked together according to a plan to achieve a specific objective.

The study of system concepts has three basic implications:

1. A system must be designed to achieve a predetermined objective.

The objective and reason for living a Benedictine Life is transformation. Intentional and daily practice of Benedictine values over one's ordinary lifetime provides a framework that leads the individual into the wholeness of God's created design for them. Benedict's desire in his Rule (or guidebook for life) was to provide a structure for living, with God and with others in community.

2. In a system interrelationships and interdependence must exist among the components.

Benedictines live with intentional commitment to a set of values and practices that guide our days with one another and with our communities, those inside and outside of monastery walls.

3. The objectives of the organization as a whole have a higher priority than the objectives of its subsystems.

As members of the St. Gertrude's community, we are "walking each other home." The relationship between cenobitic (inside the monastery) and oblate, employee, friend, neighbor (in the world) creates the opportunity for a much broader objective than we might have separately.



Jane Somerton gives a presentation during the 2024 Community Days gathering at Spirit Center.

Then, let's look at the characteristics of a system:

1. Organization implies structure and order. It is the arrangement of the components that helps to achieve objectives.

The Rule is a guidebook for the organization of monastic communities but that is not all! It provides a structure for life, accessible to anyone who desires a deep relationship to God and others. It is as relevant today as it was in the 6th century.

2. Interaction refers to the manner in which each component functions with other components of the system.

The Rule includes chapters that guide us as individuals and as members of community. Benedict knew from experience all about the challenges of life in community. The ways in which we interact with one another are guided by Benedictine values.

3. Interdependence means that parts of the organization or computer system depend on one another. They are coordinated and linked together according to a plan. One subsystem

depends on the output of another subsystem for proper functioning.

Benedict devotes entire chapters to the ways in which we should live in cooperation and care for one another.

4. Integration refers to the holism of systems. It is concerned with how a system is tied together.

Benedict completely integrated the structures of daily living - the routine, ordinary and mundane interwove with the rhythm of communal and personal prayer.

5. A system should have a central objective. Objectives may be real or stated. Although a stated objective may be the real objective, it is not uncommon for an organization to state one objective and operate to achieve another.

For Benedictines, what is the objective of a particular monastery and its charisms, of Benedictine spirituality? The answer: mission and vision.

When St. Benedict pulled together the Rule from a plethora of sources - including St. Augustine, St. Basil, and a much longer, harsher document written by an anonymous author called The Rule of the Master - he created a

system, a “school of the Lord’s service.” All the wisdom Benedict gleaned from his own studies of these sources was compiled into a way of life that encouraged deep introspection, a nurturing of the Christian values of humility, hospitality, obedience and healthy decision-making, and mutual love and respect for all in community.

That was the mission he implemented for monks and nuns both in the 6th century and now.

A vision is a clear, specific, compelling picture of what we want our community to be in 5 to 10 years.

With religious life changing dramatically since the Second Vatican Council, adapting how the Benedictine charism and spirituality is shared requires frequent reassessment. St. Benedict understood that, all those years ago, and left room in his Rule to adjust the ideals of community to fit the needs of the current era.

In other words, St. Benedict grasped the truth of human existence and the need for a profound relationship with God. He created a Rule - a system - that would survive far beyond his own lifespan.

That’s a genius, for sure!

Practice, Practice, Practice!

A passenger once asked a New York cabbie, “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” The cabbie replied, “Practice, practice, practice!” Well, it turns out that Benedictine life has a lot in common with getting to Carnegie Hall. Both involve practice, practice, practice.

Our core values of healing hospitality, grateful simplicity, and creative peacemaking aren’t just nice ideas, they are - you guessed it - practices. Healing hospitality becomes a reality when we reach out to reconcile with, or simply acknowledge, someone we dislike or with whom we disagree. In this practice, a relationship is healed or created.

Grateful simplicity changes our lives and saves our planet when we practice only using what we need, rather than taking everything that tickles our fancy.

Creative peacemaking is a practice we would all do well to focus on these days. Small actions, practiced regularly, by more and more people, will change our society. If you don’t like someone’s bumper sticker or Facebook post, pray for them rather than criticizing them. Then pray for the humility to recognize that you aren’t necessarily right.



When we practice regularly and consciously, we will be changed. It is a slow process. It’s hard; we will fall down frequently, but if we keep getting up, keep trying, we will change, and the world will be just a little bit better.

Coping with God's Generosity

By Carrie Barton, Donor Relations Coordinator

This past spring, on a sunshiny day, I went on a field trip to the Selway River. The trip was inspired by an invitation to hear Nimiipuu elders and others talk about the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests. With two national forests practically in my back yard, I have been eager to explore them.

I missed the talks - I couldn't find the rendezvous point! Disappointing? Yes, but serendipitous. I may not have found what I was initially looking for, but the day was filled with unexpected good and happy things.

Selway Falls was at its best, with spring runoff bouncing over rocks, making so much noise I had to lower the volume on my hearing aids! There must have been millions of pine trees on the surrounding mountains. Beautiful views of God's creation appeared around every corner of the dirt road. It was overwhelming and made me think about God's abundant gifts to us.

Theologian David Ford says that "...coping with God and God's generosity..." is at the heart of practicing the Christian faith. It's easy to get in the habit of thinking only of what we lack. I wonder if we're being disrespectful to God when we focus on what is absent in our lives. Can we flip the script and learn to look for God's generosity all around us?

The Center for Benedictine Life can help. Both as individuals and a community, our Benedictine values of grateful simplicity, healing hospitality, and creative peacemaking guide us in "coping" with God's generosity. How can we express Benedictine values in our everyday lives?

Here's what my Selway journey taught me about our community's values: Time in the natural world provides healing hospitality and a welcome break from too much of everything. Grateful simplicity teaches us the difference

between needs and wants, so we can make room for what is truly important. Creative peacemaking isn't done only on a grand scale; even individually, inner peace influences those around us, and on and on.

Are you seeking to enrich your spiritual life? Benedictine values and practices will lead you to a deeper relationship with God. The Center for Benedictine Life is here to accompany you on that journey.

Visit our website at www.stgertrudes.org to see the many ways you are welcome in our community. **Please join us!**



Caregiver Writing Retreat

October 3-6

**The Spiritual Discipline
of Contemporary Iconography**

October 10-16

**Redefining Retirement:
A Spiritual Practice**

October 22-24

**Yoga as a Tool for
Finding our "Inner" Harvest**

November 5-7

Am I on a Spiritual Journey?

November 12-14

**DON'T Tell Me What to Do:
PLEASE Tell Me What to Do**

November 15-17

Upcoming Retreats

Register at: www.spirit-center.org

