

CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

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OUR LIFE
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HEALING HOSPITALITY AND LOOKING IN THE MIRROR

In his Rule (a guidebook for living a spiritual life), St. Benedict entreats his monks to receive all guests as Christ. Most of us who are Benedictines are very fond of quoting this profound precept. I think we are less fond of unpacking how radical this is and how it can and should challenge us in a fundamental way.

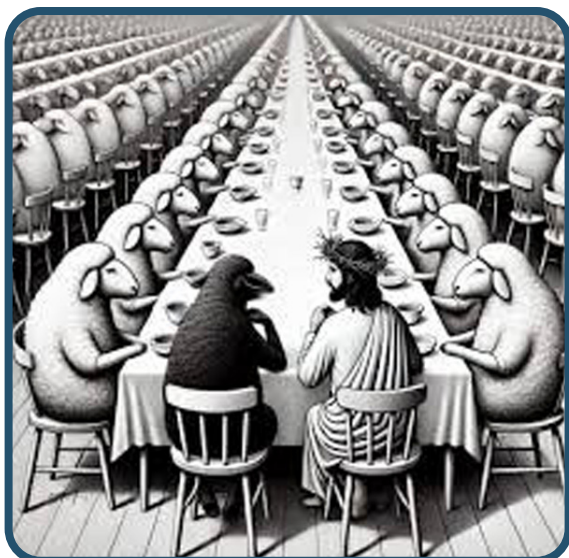
Perhaps the most important thing for us to remember when we say we “welcome Christ” is that Jesus stretched all boundaries of inclusion.

Jesus didn’t just invite people who thought like he did to the table. He welcomed righteous, God-fearing believers as well as people who were collaborators with the hated Roman Empire. His disciples were a motley crew who seemed to spend a fair amount of time arguing among themselves. And he expected them to get along!

From the Prioress

When we say we welcome all as Christ, we need to ask ourselves whether we are only welcoming people we like and who think like us. Perhaps welcoming guests as Christ means welcoming your uncle Joe, whose politics make your skin crawl. It might be welcoming cousin Sue, who is into crystals and wants to tell you all about it. Welcoming guests as Christ means welcoming people who you really, really don’t like (and it may not be their politics but just be the way they chew with their mouth open or never stop talking about their petunia patch).

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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.

Healing hospitality and generosity can manifest in the most unexpected places

by **Carrie Barton**
Mission Advancement

In 2009, my friend Jean Holland and I were part of a group that spent ten days in Lubumbashi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). We visited local schools and churches, hospitals and orphanages, and fabric shops. We helped restore a rural church that had been destroyed during a civil war. We also took a terrifying ten-minute, half-a-kilometer elevator ride down into a copper mine.

Each day, a different local family hosted our group for lunch, and another local family hosted us for dinner. Our meals were shared

with families from all walks of life. Every meal was prepared and served with great care, reminding me of a special Sunday dinner.

I asked Jean about her memories of DRC. She shared, “Families fed us so generously when I know it cost them dearly to serve us. I remember the dishes and pans they used were well used. Lids did not match, but the food was good. Outstanding for me was the family with three or four children who fed us in their very modest home, then the whole family sang for us.” With almost nothing we take for granted, like clean water and indoor plumbing, our host families offered us extravagant generosity and hospitality.

The *Rule of St. Benedict*, Chapter 53, states: “Let all the guests at their arrival be received as Christ, for he himself will one day say: ‘I was a guest, and you received me’ (Matt 25:35). So let fitting honor be shown to all, especially to the household of faith and to travelers.”



I would be surprised if any of our hosts were familiar with the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Nonetheless, we were received as Christ and shown fitting honor. That, my friends, is what healing hospitality is all about.



**Yoga as a Tool to Invite Ourselves
Into the Gifts of Summer**
July 25-27

**Hope-Filled in a
Wounded and Polarized World**
August 8-10

Emotional Healing Through Forgiveness
August 22-24

Introduction to Centering Prayer
September 5-7

Upcoming Retreats
Register at: www.spirit-center.org

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So, before any of us pat ourselves on the back for welcoming guests as Christ, perhaps we need to do an examination of conscience. When was the last time I truly welcomed someone with whom I struggled or profoundly disagreed? Did I really listen to and respect that person, or did I pat myself on the back for being “tolerant?” Did I literally - or figuratively - roll my eyes, or did I see them as someone who might be taking on the role of Christ to make me look at my own intolerance and hypocrisy?

And, in case you’re wondering, yes, this is meant to make you feel rather uncomfortable. But that’s a good thing! We don’t change or grow, we can’t be healed, unless we realize we need to change, be healed and forgiven. This is the secret guise that Jesus takes to try and meet us every day. He is a guest at our door, disguised as someone you don’t want to let in. Be careful because, if you do let him in, you



will have to risk being challenged to become more Christ-like yourself.

This is the invitation, risk and gift of healing hospitality! May we all be willing to answer the door and accept the divine invitation.

Sister Teresa Jackson OSB

Sister Teresa Jackson, OSB
Prioress

Our God is a God of Healing...

**by Sister Betty Schumacher, OSB
Spirit Center Director**

“Morning after morning I stand on tiptoe to listen to the voice of God.” Isaiah 50:4

I would like to say I am like Isaiah, waiting to hear the voice of God each morning. Instead, I awake each day to witness the miracle of the sunrise. I gaze at the sky with awe and wonder and quietly proclaim, “The sun continues to rise morning after morning.”

This is a relatively new phenomenon for me after living in the Seattle area for 25 years. When the sun shines there, the air bursts forth with sounds of life. People of all ages enjoy the luxury of its warmth: some working in their yards, others walking their dogs, and parents riding bicycles with their children. It’s as if the world is filled with life-giving energy.

The sun holds the mystical power of healing as it enwraps everyone in its warmth, embraces



all with its radiance, and is a constant reminder that our God is a God of healing.

The Spirit Center, like the sun, strives to be a place and a presence of healing hospitality. We are living in a world that is wounded, scarred, and chaotic. Throughout these days, my hope is that Spirit Center can be a place of refuge where inner peace can be re-discovered and hope becomes a constant companion.

Care of Creation...

By the Care of Creation Committee

The Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude stewards 1,400 acres of beautiful, ecologically diverse land on Idaho's Camas Prairie. Our land is mostly forested, but it also includes farm and grazing land, gardens and orchards. In 1993, our Sisters finalized a "Philosophy of Land Use" that affirmed the community's commitment to reverent care of this priceless gift from God, stating: "Through the years our community and this land have been bonded together. With humility we recognize the earth (humus) as the source from which we (humanity) receive our life and sustenance." (The full statement is available on the CBL website: <https://stgertrudes.org/about/care-of-the-land>)



A wild lily blooms beneath ponderosa pines in the monastery forest.

As we face the existential threat of global climate change, the Benedictine Rule and tradition speak to how we can address this crisis. The first sentence of the *Rule of Saint Benedict* instructs us to "Listen carefully...and incline the ear of [our] heart." Deep listening to the natural world extends beyond our

perception of sound. It demands that we open our mind, our heart, and all our senses.

When we open ourselves fully to nature, we perceive Christ, the creative Word, in every rock, every stream, every tree, every living creature. We understand that God speaks to us through Creation. We realize that we depend on the ultimate community of all life on our planet, and we are compelled to respect, honor, and give back to that community. The Benedictine concept of "enoughness," in which each person has what they need, and no one has significantly more than they need, provides a solid foundation for sustainable living that will support a healthy Earth for generations to come.



Care of Creation Committee member Sylvia Bogner Ellison examines a specimen using a microscope in the Care of Creation office.

Members of the CBL's Care of Creation Committee include Sister Teresa Jackson, our prioress; Sister Betty Schumacher, Spirit Center Director; Oblate Diane Penny; Wendy Weiger; long-term volunteer Sylvia Bogner Ellison; and CBL Executive Director Tim Oberholzer.

...In the Spirit of the Rule



On December 31, 2024, the Care of Creation Committee hosted an open house in their new office on the ground floor of the monastery.

Pictured from left to right: Edrea Eisenhower; Sister Carlotta Fontes, former member of the Stewardship of the Land Committee (a forerunner to our current Care of Creation Committee); Sister Rose Marie Nutsch; Prioress Teresa Jackson, Care of Creation Committee leader; Sylvia Bogner Ellison, Care of Creation Committee member; and Sister Carol Ann Wassmuth, Stewardship of the Land Committee founder.

The committee is working to develop both online and in-person offerings that guide members and friends of the CBL community into deeper relationship with Creation. Our grounds offer ample opportunities for contemplative engagement with nature. Wendy led mindful walks up the hill behind the monastery, with a pause for meditation along the way. She taught a nature-centered version of the Benedictine practice of *lectio divina*, known as *lectio terra*: instead of reflecting on a written text, focusing on some element of the natural world - a leaf, a flower, clouds in the sky - and open the heart to receive whatever gifts it may offer.

In April, Wendy led a weekend retreat focusing on the Passion of the Earth, a project of artwork and poetry that pairs text by Sister Teresa with fabric images by Quaker artist Melanie Weidner. This installation, located in the Spirit Center, integrates scientific and Biblical understanding of the story of our universe. In June, Sister Carlotta will lead a retreat exploring plants on the monastery grounds that may be used for medicinal purposes.

Last year, the CBL offered five sessions on Monastic Land Stewardship as part of its online Diffusions program. These remain available on the CBL YouTube channel. On YouTube, viewers

will also find an ongoing series of Mindful Minutes—short, meditative nature videos, mostly recorded on the monastery grounds.

When we open ourselves fully to the wonders of God's Creation, we find miracles all around us, every moment of every day. We invite you to step outside, wherever you may be, and listen deeply.



During the open house, Care of Creation Committee member Wendy Weiger demonstrated wilderness first aid techniques with Sister Carlotta Fontes, former member of the Stewardship of the Land Committee.

Hospitality at the Historical Museum: Sharing Stories

by **Carla Wilkins**
Museum Director

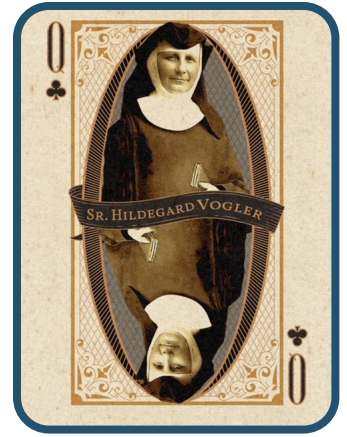
At the Historical Museum, we believe hospitality means making stories accessible to all. On **August 2, from 1:00-3:00 PM**, we invite you to experience living history characters who shaped Idaho County's early years. These fascinating figures, featured in the Idaho County Poker and Pinochle decks created by Jerry Johnson, will bring the past to life.



*Lynnae Iffrig as Sister
Hildegard Vogler*

The living history characters will be stationed throughout the museum and will chat about themselves for about 90 seconds. Sister Alfreda Elsensohn and Sister Hildegard Vogler will be present again this year, with a selection of new faces telling their stories. Sponsorship by Cottonwood Community Credit Union

*Sister Hildegard
Vogler's card from
the new Poker and
Pinochle decks.*



allows us to offer free admission for the event, making this rich, shared history available to everyone.

The Historical Museum's commitment to hospitality also extends to local schools. Thanks to a generous grant from Mary Schweitzer, school children can tour the museum for free. We hope these visits inspire curiosity and a love of history.

To further ensure a welcoming experience, we provide ample museum seating, a walker and wheelchair for guest use, and QR codes offering audio descriptions of exhibits. Our exhibits also feature large print for easy reading.

We look forward to welcoming you to the museum — where history is not only preserved but also shared with open arms.

Sister Kim Marie Jordan Will Be Missed

Sister Kim Marie Jordan, 70, passed into eternal life on February 16, 2025, at the Center for Benedictine Life at the Monastery of St. Gertrude, Cottonwood, Idaho. Many heartfelt tributes were offered, with over 100 comments posted on social media.

The Center for Benedictine Life employees were especially touched by Sister Kim Marie's quiet presence as she endured her illness. Among their posted reflections:

"She's the light of many people's lives and she will be missed."

"Sister Kim was such a sweet woman. Even her last days she always had a smile."

Coworkers remembered Sister Kim Marie with fondness, posting their thoughts.

"What a pleasure it was to work with Sister Kim. We solved lots of problems together."

"You were an awesome coworker at SJRMC. You will be missed by many."

For guests of the CBL, Sister Kim Marie embodied Benedictine hospitality.

"A beautiful soul. She welcomed me so warmly during my time there as artist-in-residence. I am ever grateful for her sweet spirit and gift of hospitality."

Her family will certainly feel her absence. As Jane Tijerina wrote:

"I will always be grateful to Kim for being part of our family... a loving and nurturing mother to my niece and nephew."

Marcia Franklin of Idaho Public Television, posted:

"I met Sister Kim Marie at her Solemn Profession and stayed in touch, interviewing her in 2020 for a television program. She was such a light."

Sister Kim Marie's full obituary can be read on our website: <https://stgertrudes.org/people-of-the-monastery/in-memorial>



Healing Hospitality in the Monastery

by **Tim Oberholzer**
CBL Executive Director

Healing Hospitality finds expression in communities living the Rule of St. Benedict. This story takes place in a monastery, but the value extends beyond walls and vows. Perhaps you've lived a similar experience.

Hydraulics hiss softly, closing the doors behind Brother Charles. Passing from the grey, cinder block monastery cloister now sealed off behind him, the novice adjusts to the bright lights, white walls, and wood floors of the infirmary.

The door to Brother Edward's room stands ajar. The old monk sits propped up by pillows in his wooden rocking chair. Charles knocks loudly to be heard.

"Come in! Come in!" urges Brother Edward, beckoning to the only other chair in the simple room.

The two monks connected in the shared practice of visiting the basement chapel at 4:00 every morning, after the community prays Vigils. Charles sits in a corner spending the hour struggling to evade distractions and enter prayer. Brother Edward sits on a bench at the front of the room lost in prayer with his forehead pressed against the tabernacle's pedestal. Brother Edward has what Brother Charles seeks.

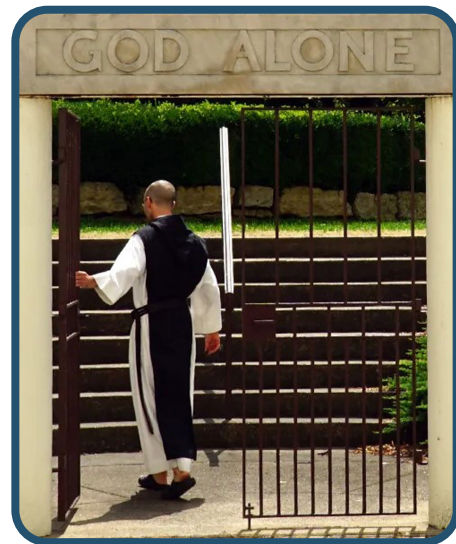
Charles visits Brother Edward every Sunday afternoon. The old monk tells stories of his childhood on a dairy farm during the depression: Climbing the windmill. Mama milking cows. Riding in the car with Father. Yoking the plow horses. A cow stepping in a pail of fresh milk. Attending the one-room schoolhouse through 6th grade. Growing weary of farm life. He also tells stories of his early days at the monastery: Breaking his leg when Old Blue fell on black ice. Praying the "Brothers' Office." Getting trapped in the bullpen with an angry bull. Communicating by sign language to preserve silence.

The monastic stories leave Charles longing for similar faith and simplicity. He compares

himself to the gnarled old man before him. The differences far exceed the similarities. Will I ever become a monk like him?

As if reading his mind, the old man fixes his eyes on the novice, "Brother Charles, whether you stay or leave does not matter, as long as you are seeking God alone." The words are gentle yet as direct and clear as his gaze.

Who said anything about leaving? Does he think I'm going to leave? Does he think I shouldn't be a monk? Charles feels uncertainty rush into his heart. As quickly as it appears it recedes. He knows Brother Edward neither presumes nor judges. From his stories, Charles knows Brother Edward experienced doubt and uncertainty. This is how he became the monk he is!



The Trappist distillation of the Benedictine vocation is, "God Alone." Brother Edward lives it. Brother Charles ponders it anew. The two monks sit in comfortable silence. Eventually, Charles rises and offers his goodbye. Brother Edward extends his hands and prays:

"The LORD bless you and keep you:
The LORD make his face shine upon you,
and be gracious to you:
The LORD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace."

Blessed and encouraged, Brother Charles returns to the cloister. The infirmary doors hiss closed behind him.

The Meaning of Koinonia of St. Gertrude

While previously known as the Benedictine Cohousing Companions and, later, the Benedictine Cohousing Community, the current members of this community have determined - after much prayer, reflection and discussion - those names did not adequately reflect who the community is, or who they are becoming. They have decided to rename the community ***Koinonia of St. Gertrude***.

As Edrea Eisenhauer explained: ***Koinonia*** is a Greek term for the fellowship or body of believers, intimate spiritual communion and participative sharing in a common religious commitment and spiritual community.

Koinonia is being in agreement with one another, being united in purpose and serving alongside each other. Our Koinonia with each other is based on our common Koinonia with Jesus Christ. The early Christians “continuously devoted themselves to fellowship.” Acts 2:42.

In the commentary on Chapter 1 of her inclusive translation titled *St. Benedict's Rule*, Sister Judith Sutura, OSB writes, “The name cenobite comes from the Greek ‘Koinonia’, a word that was used to signify not just a group of people but a community. We find in the Scripture passage ‘Our blessing cup is a Koinonia with the blood of Christ.’ More than just general community, it is rather a



The members of the Koinonia of St. Gertrude pause on the fifth floor of the monastery in April.

Left to right: Jeanette Kelley, Chris Roberts and Edrea Eisenhauer.

communion, a mingling that is greater than the parts and thereafter inseparable.”

The community is a group of single women who commit to creating a new way to live Benedictine spirituality. They do not make vows or a life commitment, but covenant with the Center for Benedictine Life community to explore how to live according to the *Rule of St. Benedict*, adapted for new circumstances in the 21st century.

For more information, visit the website:
<https://stgertrudes.org/koinoniaofstgertrude>



*Find Benedictine hospitality
in the natural beauty of the
Camas Prairie.*

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at St. Gertrude

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