



CANTICLE OF ST. GERTRUDE

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OUR LIFE
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BENEDICT IN A WORLD WHERE INSTANT GRATIFICATION TAKES TOO LONG

I frequently hope that I'm not the only person in the world who feels like they've developed attention deficit disorder in old age. If I scroll through videos on social media, they better grab my attention in about four seconds or I'll keep going. I always read before bed, but if the book requires any amount of concentration, I go try to find a page-turner. When this happens, I start to think, "I was reading Dickens and Dostoyevsky in high school - for fun! - what has happened to me!?"

I suspect what has happened to me, and others, is our modern "attention economy." Everyone is competing for our attention: to sell us things, get our support, our time, our money. The result is that we are overwhelmed and inundated with content, demands, stuff, and we become overwhelmed and unable to focus.

This is where St. Benedict comes in. Obviously, neither Benedict nor his monks ever scrolled through a Facebook feed, but attention spans were fragile things even in

the sixth century. For that reason, Benedict set up a clear schedule of how monks would spend their day. There was time for work, sleep, multiple hours for common prayer, and also designated periods of prayerful reading.

From the Prioress

Prayerful reading meant having set times for quiet: reading, memorizing and reflecting on Scripture and other holy texts. And, here's the kicker: Benedict had his monks do this for 2-3 hours a day. A day! Not a week, not ten minutes here and there, but a big chunk of every day.

How was this possible?! Let's try a little experiment. Find a nice quiet spot, settle in, relax, turn off your phone, now try reading these verses from Psalm 63 very slowly, whisper them out loud to yourself:

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Sister Margie Hasn't Quite Retired

After spending 32 years ministering in Lewiston, Idaho, Sister Margie Schmidt moved home to the Monastery of St. Gertrude in 2025. But that move didn't necessarily mean she'd retired. She's taken a position as volunteer chaplain at St. Mary's Hospital in Cottonwood, continuing her long practice of providing pastoral care to the ill.

Reflecting on her time in Lewiston, Sister Margie noted how much she enjoyed serving at St. Stanislaus Catholic Church for 12 of those years, "working with the people in the parish and in the community. They taught me so much about living and loving and giving to others. They were and are friends."



She then accepted the position of director of pastoral care at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in Lewiston. "This was a new ministry to me," she recalled. "I loved learning and working with all the health care people at St. Joe's. I was involved in many of the activities and projects."

Her ministry throughout the facility allowed her the privilege of getting to know many of the staff, patients and visitors. The opportunity to spend time with patients dealing with end of life transitions and their families moved her deeply. "It was an honor to be with them, pray with them and share their sorrow," she said.

Sister Margie made plants a part of her ministry at the hospital, nurturing the seeds as they grew and gifting them to staff and visitors. These Pastoral Care Prayer Plants encouraged the recipients to pray for someone as they tended the plant. Over two decades, she estimates distributing at least 2,000 plants.

Also during this time, Sister Margie served as a chaplain for St. Joseph's Hospice. "I traveled around the area, visiting homes of the patients," she explained. "I was asked to lead services for many people who had passed. I learned so much about grieving from the families and loved ones."

With a total of 59 years of ministry to her credit, Sister Margie decided to retire from her position at St. Joseph Regional Medical Center in May 2025. Navigating the transition and move to the monastery was a challenge, but she remarked, "It is wonderful to get to know my sisters as we continue to grow together. The Sisters have been very welcoming and gracious and patient with me!"

Excited about her new ministry as volunteer chaplain at St. Mary's, Sister Margie finds herself getting acquainted with the local community. "Many of the people I meet are familiar and most of them are related!! I feel at home in the hospital and am very happy I have been welcomed into the St. Mary's family."

A great deal of Sister Margie's ministry is about presence. "I have learned throughout the years that a smile, a greeting or some acknowledgment of the other is vital," she said. "I value respect, kindness and a sense of humor."

Sister Margie continues to expand her activities at the monastery, too, greeting guests at Spirit Center and the Farm House, and working with the valued volunteers who, she observed, "help keep us focused on the broader world."

She finds praying the Divine Office with the Center for Benedictine Life community an essential part of daily life, as well. "I am still learning and adjusting to this new life," she said. "I know this is where I belong at this time in my life, and I will keep on praying, learning, offering kindness and laughing! God is with me and giving me joy."

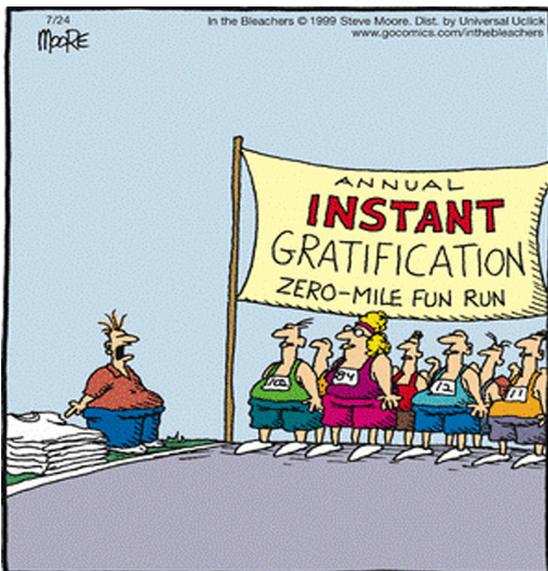
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O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and
weary land where there is no water.

Because your steadfast love is better
than life, my lips will praise you.
So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift
up my hands and call on your name.

Just slow way down, relax, focus on one line. How does that one short line make you feel, what does it make you think of? Let your mind wander as you think of times or experiences of longing for God. Simply go where your thoughts take you. Slow down, there's no goal, no right answer, no particular way to do this, no test, just reflecting on one little phrase and seeing where it takes you. After a while, your reflections might become a prayer, opening your heart to God. You might keep going, focusing on another short phrase.

This is what Benedict had his monks do. It was their work. Was it always easy? No, but he made sure that everyone had regular, scheduled times and places to pray with Scripture in this way. He knew that, if we have a structure - a way that we know how, when and where we'll be doing this, just like we know when, where and how we'll



"Runners to your mark. Get set. Go! ... OK, come get your T-shirts."



brush our teeth each day - we are more likely to do it.

Why did the monks do this hard work? Benedict was focused on practicalities, but he also said: "[A]s we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love." How's that for a reward for hard work!?

What if this was your work? Every day, same time, same place, read a very short passage from Scripture or other spiritual source. You won't get a T-shirt, sorry! But maybe, just maybe, you will begin to grow spiritually, have a heart full of love, and create an attention economy focused on God rather than influencers.

Sister Teresa Jackson OSB

Sister Teresa Jackson, OSB
Prioress

Tributes to Sister Claudia Rae Braun

Whether it's family or friends, or even Benedictine community members, when someone passes into eternal life, memories seem to come flooding back.

Such was the case when Sister Claudia Rae Braun passed - rather unexpectedly - on December 2, 2025. After posting the announcement on the CBL social media platforms, tributes were added by many.

Among them:

Teri Daly wrote, "She was a lovely soul and very kind to me during my time at the monastery."

Kim Carrington noted, "I'm so grateful for the time we had and the memories we made on those road trips to Nezperce. Your calm spirit was a constant source of peace for me, especially on those snowy roads."

"I loved Sister Claudia Rae," commented Linda Helms. "I worked with her at St. Benedict's for many years. She was great at any job she did there! She would say a prayer every day over the speaker for the entire hospital and Long Term Care Unit to hear."

Linda added, "We who knew her and loved her at St. Benedict's Hospital are missing her smile and her kindness."



Claudia Rae's niece, Joan Mary Ozmun, recalled, "My Auntie, loved her so much. Mike and I stayed with her a few weekends when she lived in Jerome, and she came several years to our big Vogel thanksgiving celebrations in Idaho Falls. Mike would say 'going to the nunnery' whenever we'd go visit!"

Marjorie Walker Hansen wrote, "I remember her being very kind to my son when he was a very wiggly little boy during a Mass."

Angie McDonald may have summed up the loss of Claudia Rae best: "You will be missed terribly by your colleagues and friends."

May Sister Claudia Rae and all the faithful departed rest in peace!

Sacred Art of Traditional Iconography

February 9-13

Lent: Encountering the Sacred

February 20-22

A Watercolor Journey

March 10-12

Centering Prayer Intensive

March 16-22

Transformation: A Faith Journey

March 25-29

Check out our Diffusions: Wisdom from the Center online programs
www.spirit-center.org


Spirit Center

**Upcoming
Retreats**

Discerning with the Koinonia

About the Author: Mary is currently an Inquirer in the Koinonia community, and is spending Winter '25-'26 living at the Monastery of St. Gertrude on the fifth floor. She retired in 2018 after a career in academia.

Since my retirement in 2018, I've felt a hunger to deepen my relationship with God in a more systematic way. By temperament, I am a hermit and an outdoorswoman, and have spent the bulk of my years since retirement alone in the backcountry, hiking and horse riding in wilderness areas in the western US; northern Rockies in the summer, low desert of Arizona in the winter, and somewhere in between in the spring and fall. These years have been a period of deep joy and (self-)discovery as I wander around in God's creation.

Quite by accident – or maybe, it wasn't an accident – I stumbled upon a remote Benedictine monastery in northern New Mexico a couple years ago. I stayed there in the guesthouse for a week and was captivated by the deep silence, punctuated by the Liturgy of the Hours chanted seven times a day. Something about the Peace of the place really spoke to me, and I left with the feeling that God was calling me to become associated with a monastery, somehow. As often happens when God calls, details are tbd.

Fast-forward a year later, I was writing something in which I was trying to tie together the concepts of wilderness, place, and religion, and, while googling a reference for a passage I wanted to quote, I stumbled upon a series of recordings on YouTube for an online conference on Monastic Land Stewardship. Hmm. The organization that had hosted the conference and posted the videos was the Center for Benedictine Life (CBL) at the Monastery of St. Gertrude. Hmmm. I looked at some of the other videos on YouTube created by the CBL and found one about a new co-housing community for women. Hmmm. (In the interim since that video was recorded, the co-housing community has been re-named "Koinonia," a Greek word meaning "fellowship" or "communion.") I was immediately intrigued, and thought this may be the "association with a monastery" that I had felt called to a year earlier.

Fast-forward six months, I spent the month of July 2025 as a volunteer, living on the fifth

floor at the Monastery of St. Gertrude. My volunteer work was mostly outdoors – pulling weeds, pruning bushes, and the like, which suits me very well. I walked the trail up and around the forest on the monastery grounds above the church several times a day, and experienced the joy and abundance of once again wandering in God's creation. In addition to attending the thrice-daily services and eating meals with the Sisters in the common dining room, I got to know the other three women in the Koinonia, and learned what it is like to actually live here in this community.

I returned home to Montana for the remainder of the summer and first half of the fall. As I write this, I am now back on the fifth floor of the monastery for the winter, trying to discern whether THIS is what God "had in mind" when God called me to have an association with a monastery.

My spiritual background is Quaker (Religious Society of Friends), and I have a deep affinity for contemplative prayer, both as a personal spiritual practice and in corporate worship in the manner of Friends. My understanding of the role and practice of contemplative prayer within the monastic tradition has been largely informed by Thomas Merton's many writings on the subject. It has been interesting to be present at this stage in the development of the Center for Benedictine Life, as the Monastery of St. Gertrude transitions from a community of professed Sisters with outward-facing apostolates, to a community that includes the unprofessed and emphasizes more of the contemplative side within the monastic tradition. It is still a work-in-progress and I have the sense that I am on the cutting edge of a new development within Benedictinism, which is an exciting place to be.

The Prioress, Sister Teresa, and the other Sisters and members of the Koinonia community have been very supportive of my explorations. I have experienced the Center for Benedictine

Life as a place of true Christian love, which is a breath of fresh air in our broken world. As my personal discernment continues, I am open to whichever way the Lord leads. At this point, I can say with Thomas Merton "I do not see the road ahead of me." However things turn out, my time at St. Gertrude's has been life-changing.

Exciting Changes at the Museum

by **Carla Wilkins**
Museum Director

It has been ten years since the section of the Historical Museum at St. Gertrude dedicated to telling the story of the sisters was completed. In that time, much has changed within the community. The most significant development has been the establishment of the Monastery of St. Gertrude's Center for Benedictine Life and the creation of the Koinonia — a new way of living Benedictine life where lay women share prayer, work, and community life with the sisters. Helping visitors understand the evolving expression of Benedictine life has become an important focus for updating the sisters' story.

One exciting update is that we are now featuring two short films created by Scott Putnam of Bluz River Productions, who generously volunteered his time and talent for this project. One film beautifully captures the history and campus of the Monastery, offering visitors a moving sense of place and its enduring

story. The second film focuses on the Koinonia, highlighting its spirit of community, service, and shared life. These films are now running in the museum and add a dynamic new dimension to the visitor experience. We are deeply grateful to Scott for this meaningful gift.

Another update focus is to provide answers to the most often asked questions: How many women made formal vows at St. Gertrude's? (313) How many stayed? (230) How many sisters were immigrants from Switzerland? (74) What's the greatest number of women who lived here at one time? (185) How many women came and left without taking vows? (about 200) Does the Swiss convent still exist? (Yes) Does the Catholic Church financially support the sisters? (No)

With fewer visitors over the winter, museum staff took the opportunity to begin installing updates. The next time you visit, you'll find many of them in place—and we hope you'll discover how the Benedictine story continues to grow and adapt here on the Camas Prairie.

Entering into a New Year

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

I was intrigued when walking into the Art Room at Spirit Center and witnessing a retreatant diligently working on a very large collage calendar for 2026. She said she wanted to live the year of 2026 in a new way, a more intentional and meaningful way. Each month was carefully depicted with different pictures torn out of magazines, as well as short quips. These included: "slow down," "savor the gift of nature," "connect with friends," "find places of peace," etc.

In light of her calendar, the following is my hope and prayer for the Spirit Center in 2026.

May it be a time to sink into the stillness and allow God's breath to permeate your being.

May it be a time to be present with compassion to those who are suffering from injustice.

May it be a time to stand in nature and be filled with awe at the manifestation of God's handiwork.

May it be a time to reflect upon the sacred stories of others who challenge and affirm our very being.

May it be a time of mindfulness watching for new signs of life, igniting a spark of wonder, and knowing that all is holy.

May it be a time to enjoy the "simple things": a meaningful conversation, cup of coffee, special meal, great book, etc.

May it be a time of deep gratitude for all that was, is and will be.

Five Years from Now

by Tim Oberholzer
CBL Executive Director

“What do you think you’ll be doing five years from now?” The interview question gave me pause. Five years as a Trappist monk taught me an economy of words used sparingly. Five months ago, I was still wearing that monastic habit. Five hours earlier, I drove to the Monastery of St. Gertrude for the first time. Now, I am being asked to look five years into the future.

There is a saying that “The reason you enter the monastery is not the reason you stay.” It speaks to **why** rather than **what**. My why eroded at New Melleray Abbey and a new why failed to emerge. Why was I now pondering the future at another monastery?



It took me more than five years to realize God did not ask me to be a Trappist monk. My attraction to monastic life and its witness to the world remained despite my departure. St. Gertrude’s promised an

alternative participation in monasticism. The monastery offered meaningful employment (including room and board) and an open invitation to join in the communal prayer without the 24/7 commitments and complexities of professed religious life. I could have one foot in and one foot out.

In that 2018 interview, I described my transition from religious life and my desire for simplicity and stability. I explained that I saw the Innkeeper position as an answer to prayer rather than a stepping stone to loftier goals. Five years later, the Monastic Council, at the recommendation of the Center for Benedictine Life pilot board of directors, offered me the new role of Executive Director.

Why did I accept the position? The sisters of St. Gertrude and the communities of the Center for Benedictine Life delivered on the promise of new ways to live monastic life. WE are St. Gertrude’s. The sisters, employees, Koinonia, Oblates, retreatants, and benefactors all welcomed me as Christ welcomes the guest. I was all in. No more straddling the fence. I committed my gifts and talents to support the common futures of these communities.

What do I think I’ll be doing five years from now? I will serve at the pleasure of the Center for Benedictine Life board of directors, the prioress, and the monastic council of the Monastery of St. Gertrude. I will carry out the board’s strategies by continuing to lead the day-to-day operations of the Center for Benedictine Life. We will provide for the support, health, and retirement needs of the sisters, care for the physical environment and space to live out the monastic life and witness to the world, maintain the community-owned facilities and provide for future physical plant needs, and support the various ministries and works of the CBL communities. That Christ may bring us all together to everlasting life.

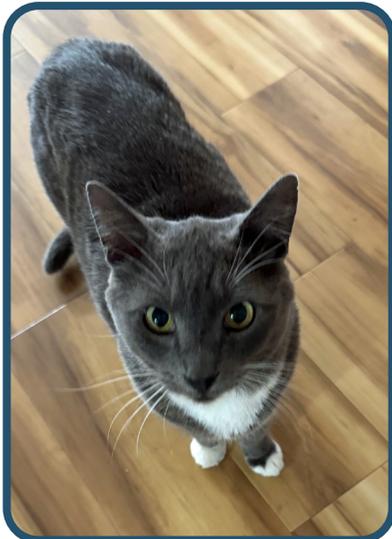
Creative Peacemaking as demonstrated by Stormy and Tuxedo

Tuxedo: One day last fall, I was on my way from the chapel steps to my home in Solitude House. Stormy was blocking my way! I asked him to move. He did not budge! I was so surprised that it took me a minute to remember that not all communication is verbal. Even though Stormy hadn't verbalized anything, he made it clear that he did not want me to pass, although I had no idea why.

Stormy: One day last fall, I was resting on the sidewalk near the chapel after a long walk around the monastery grounds when suddenly Tuxedo was in my space! He rudely demanded that I move!! I was irritated and ignored him. The situation was becoming tense. I wondered if I should step away even if I was exhausted from my long walk.



Tuxedo



Stormy

Tuxedo: Stormy refused to let me pass! I couldn't imagine why he was being so stubborn. Could it be that I had startled him and interrupted his rest?

Stormy: Why should I have to interrupt my peaceful walk just because Tuxedo wanted to go home? Maybe Tuxedo needed to get home for an important reason, and maybe that reason was treats!

With a little encouragement from a third party (a.k.a Michele), Stormy and Tuxedo learned they could make peace by:

1. putting aside existing knowledge and activities,
2. considering the other's perspective,
3. understanding that not all communication is verbal, and
4. engaging in collaboration and creativity.

And they went happily on their separate ways.

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