



# Canticle of St. Gertrude

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE | 2026



## PRIORESS'S REFLECTION: EASTER, CONFUSION AND THE CENTER FOR BENEDICTINE LIFE

*Sr. Teresa Jackson, Prioress*

During this Easter season I spent a lot of time with the resurrection stories in the Gospels. It is striking to me that the disciples have a lot of trouble recognizing that Jesus has risen from the dead. Depending on the Gospel account they are fearful, clueless, or disbelieving. Those of us who know how the story ends don't quite understand why it was so hard to recognize the risen Christ.

But it is hard to recognize something that is SO completely new, so out of keeping with how we understand reality. When you're in the middle of the story and don't know how it ends it is difficult and disorienting to have your sense of reality fundamentally shaken. After all, when was the last time you saw someone come back from the dead?

I suspect that the resurrection stories are actually a good lens through which to understand anything profoundly new in our lives. It takes a while to adjust to the loss of what was and to recognize something we have no context for. When people think about St. Gertrude's they think about Roman Catholic, vowed sisters living in a castle near Cottonwood, Idaho. There's a not entirely conscious assumption that if there are no sisters then there's no St. Gertrude's. It's hard to imagine this place without the sisters. But like the disciples at the empty tomb or walking to Emmaus, we are being asked to see a new reality.

The Center for Benedictine Life is about LIFE! Yes, there are fewer sisters, yes, some of the traditional ministries have been let go of, but if you can be like the disciples and learn to see risen life, a new reality that is

not grief but seeing life in a new form. We invite you to see the new forms of resurrection happening here at St. Gertrude's:

- New life is the continuity of the 23 vowed sisters who continue to be the heart of St. Gertrude's.
- New life is happening in the community of over 90 of our oblates living Benedictine life in nine smaller communities across the country.
- New life is present in the Koinonia Community of four women who are committed to being the continuity of Benedictine life in this place.
- New life is happening as we develop "Small Benedictine Communities" and training leaders through the Benedictine Formation Leadership Program.
- New life is present in the form of the community of over 30 dedicated employees integral to the Center for Benedictine Life.
- New life has been happening over the last ten years as we have hosted over 70 artists in residence who stay for a month at a time.
- New life is springing up as our long-term commitment to our land evolves into the Care of Creation ministry.
- New life is reflected in a new emphasis on deeply engaging with our local community.
- New life continues through our thriving ministries of the Spirit Center, Museum and Inn. Please pray, join and support us as we spread the good news of new life at St. Gertrude's!



## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE: WE MUST TRY

*Tim Oberholzer, Executive Director  
Center for Benedictine Life*

“Do. Or do not. There is no try.”

This quote from *The Empire Strikes Back* presents a binary inviting perfectionism or paralysis. The Center for Benedictine Life preserves what we do well at the Monastery of St. Gertrude, recognizes what will happen if we do not adapt to present realities, and offers structures and resources to try to sustain and advance the legacy and mission of this community.

We seek God, understanding that this pursuit is fulfilled in community. “We are all walking each other home.” Prayer, work, and study are rooted in stability, open to transformation, and informed by obedience. The CBL preserves these practices and values.

The trap of “Do. Or do not.” comes from the illusion of control. It assumes sheer determination of will overcomes all variables. One thing is certain: the experiences of other communities foretell what will happen if we do not adapt. Aging and diminishment point to an end. The Center for Benedictine Life proposes an alternative outcome.

Our history is a story of a community willing to try. From the sisters who left Sarnen to the construction of the Monastery in Cottonwood, to the launch of the Spirit Center and Inn, we have tried new things. If we become the Center for Benedictine Life, we offer a future even if it is different. We must try.

## LAUNCH OF NEW CARE OF CREATION MINISTRY AND SEASON OF CREATION 2026

The Care of Creation Ministry sponsors programs on experiencing God’s presence in the natural world and honoring the natural world as God’s Creation in our choices and in our actions, in accordance with Benedictine values and Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. It’s still early days for the ministry, but several projects are already in the works: flexible programming to encourage retreatants to experience solitude and quiet contemplation on the grounds and in the forest above the monastery, a newly-created vegetable garden to let retreatants with a love of gardening “play in the dirt,” a retreat scheduled for mid-August entitled “Experiencing creation as Creation,” and a full line-up of events in September and early October celebrating the Season of Creation. More information at: <https://stgertrudes.org/season-of-creation>



## LEGACY, STEWARDSHIP, AND CONTINUITY

For over 1,500 years, Benedictines have lived lives of prayer and service. Our own community has carried this tradition forward, rooted in the Camas Prairie since 1909. Our history is a legacy of stewardship, with generations of Sisters serving as nurses, teachers, ministers, and more—continually serving others through the Benedictine rhythm of prayer and work (*Ora et Labora*).

Today, the Monastery is evolving into the Center for Benedictine Life—a spiritual sanctuary for a modern world. This living presence is shaped by our Sisters, oblates, our Koinonia cohousing community, and our dedicated employees and volunteers. Together, we practice grateful simplicity through our ministries and outreach, and we honor God’s immanent presence through Care of Creation and the stewardship of our 1,400 acres. This stewardship extends to the human spirit through our Spirituality & the Arts ministry. We champion the arts as Christ-centered peacemaking that heals divides and inspires the soul to praise. Whether preserving heritage at the Museum or extending healing Benedictine hospitality through the Spirit Center and the Inn, we remain dedicated to a legacy of continuity, welcoming all who cross our threshold. We offer contemplative space for learning, renewal and crucial conversation as we partner with others for a better world. Through a shared commitment to Benedictine values and the transforming power of a life centered on God, the Monastery of St. Gertrude will flourish long into the future.



## SPIRIT CENTER REFLECTION: A LIFE-GIVING RAIN

*Sr. Betty Schumacher  
Spirit Center Director*

May your spirit receive the gentle rain of God’s presence where anything may happen and everything is possible.

As I witness the spring rain gradually seeping into the earth to bring forth life within the flowers, trees and various crops, I find myself reflecting on how rain can be a life-giving metaphor for what happens at Spirit Center.

Retreatants come to the Spirit Center for various reasons:

- Some come to participate in a particular retreat to deepen their spirituality, to explore their experience of God through art, or to re-discover ways to sustain a life of balance. Some come to share and support one another in their ministry as bishops, leaders, and staffs of varied faith traditions.
- Some are college students who want a deeper understanding and experience of monasticism.
- Some come for a private retreat, a time to simply be.
- Some come with heavy hearts knowing the experience of grief or are struggling in a relationship.
- Some come with a friend or family member to deepen their relationship.
- Some come to wonder about the hills, to walk on holy ground, and to experience the Sacred in the gift of nature.

My hope and prayer are that Spirit Center can be like a soothing rain, a healing presence, a place of deep peace, a space that allows one to touch into the depth of their being and see the goodness that God has planted within them.



## THE BLESSING OF THE FIELDS

Each year on April 25, the Feast of St. Mark, we observe the traditional ritual of blessing the fields. This ancient custom connects our prayer life in the chapel to the sacred ground that sustains us.

As Evening Prayer concludes, we process from the chapel behind the light of the Paschal candle. Chanting the Litany of the Saints, we move through the monastery and out into the fields. There, the Prioress turns to each of the four cardinal directions—East, West, North, and South—blessing the land with holy water. The accompanying prayers recognize the holiness of the earth and our shared responsibility to care for our common planetary home.

It is a simple moment of stillness, honoring the land and the life it supports.



## UPCOMING RETREATS AT SPIRIT CENTER

Spirit Center offers contemplative space for learning, renewal, and crucial conversation with others for a better world. Sometimes that means taking private time in silence and nature. Sometimes that means a group retreat to express or deepen spiritual longings. Sometimes that means sitting in safe conversation with the Holy Spirit and a spiritual director. For more information or to register for a retreat, please contact us at (208) 962- 2000, bschumacher@stgertrudes.org or stgertrudes.org/retreats.

### Sensing the Divine with St Hildegard of Bingen.

*With Karla Neumann Smiley, Obl.S.B.* | July 7 - 10, 2026

Engage your five senses to explore the multi-sensory legacy of St. Hildegard of Bingen—a 12th-century Benedictine mystic, visionary, artist, composer, and herbalist. Discover how her ancient gifts can draw us closer to the Divine today.

### Come to the Quiet

*With Retreat Team* | July 17 - 24, 2026

Relax in God's presence during a week of deep silence. Retreatants enjoy a private room, private bathroom, and three meals a day. Optional offerings include spiritual direction, communal prayer with the sisters, t'ai chi body prayer, faith sharing, and creating a sand mandala.

### Experiencing Creation as CREATION

*With Mary Litch* | August 9 - 14, 2026

Experience God's immanence in the natural world through Franciscan theology. Using indoor and outdoor exercises, participants will cultivate mindfulness and gratitude, culminating in outdoor exercises based on Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, Laudato Si'.

### Mappa Divina 2026

*With Heather Berndt* | September 10 - 13, 2026

Navigate the uncertainties and threshold of midlife with a creative, contemplative process. Drawing from cartography,

mythology, and Jungian psychology, Mappa Divina© invites you to use imagery, words, and prayer to map your evolving self and find greater clarity and wholeness.

### A Watercolor Journey II

*With Pearl Maxner* | September 15 - 17, 2026

Surrounded by the peace of the Monastery, take the next step toward becoming a confident watercolorist. Revisit basic techniques and build new skills. Prerequisite: "A Watercolor Journey" or any beginner watercolor class.

### Introduction to Centering Prayer

*With Donna Kreiensieck and Mary Bieter*

September 18 - 20, 2026

Rooted in the Benedictine tradition of silence, centering prayer is a "return to the heart" to awaken the depths of our being. This introductory retreat provides the fundamentals of the practice to help you develop a continuing discipline of being present to the Lord.

### Spiritual Discipline of Contemporary Iconography

*With Kara Gillette* | October 8 - 14, 2026

Connect deeply with God through the ancient practice of icon writing. This 6-day retreat offers detailed guidance using traditional techniques alongside modern materials like acrylic paint and 23kt gold leaf. Embrace your creativity and work as a form of contemplative prayer.

### The Letter : An Intimate Pilgrimage

*With Cheryl Johnson and Tim Oberholzer*

October 27 - 31, 2026

Accompany each other on a personal road to Emmaus. Focus your pilgrimage on one "person" (a loved one, Saint, God, or even nature) and explore a variety of ways to write letters expressing gratitude, forgiveness, or healing. Leave with a meaningful stack of letters to mail or keep.

### Individual Retreat

Flexible Dates

St. Benedict said, "Listen with the ear of your heart." Why? It is this type of listening that allows the hearing of divine wisdom and inspiration that guides our lives into ever-increasing fullness, peace, and joy. But sometimes the noise and blur of life make that difficult. That is why we offer you the opportunity to come to Spirit Center and listen.

## REVERENT LISTENING

Idaho Listens is a statewide initiative created by Boise State University's Institute for Advancing American Values. Its purpose is to bring together ordinary people from different backgrounds, careers, and beliefs to share their personal stories while the audience practices complete, silent, "reverent listening" without interrupting or judging. The ultimate goal is to encourage communities across Idaho and our country to step away from arguments and rebuild connection, trust, and understanding simply by learning from each other.

Our own Sister Betty Schumacher participated in the Idaho Listens event hosted at the historic Lewis & Clark Hotel in Lewiston on April 14th. Sister Betty shared how her Benedictine values of hospitality and community shaped her parish work, particularly through the creation of the "Safe Parking" program at St. Jude's in Redmond, Washington, which offers a secure place and basic necessities for individuals sleeping in their cars. Grounding her message in her lifelong journey as a Sister of St. Gertrude's, she emphasized our shared responsibility to walk with the poor, foster deep human connections, and build a unified society. We will share the video link with you as soon as it is posted.



## WISDOM FROM THE CENTER

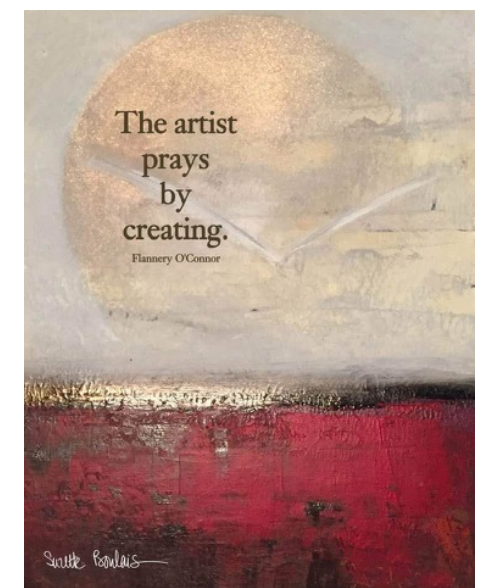
### DIFFUSIONS: WISDOM FROM THE CENTER

In addition to in-person retreats, Spirit Center also offers Diffusions: Wisdom from the Center, which are various online programs sharing Benedictine spirituality and other topics with participants around the globe.

Please join Dr. Samantha Miller, an assistant professor of theology at Whitworth University, in reading with and about St. Gertrude of Helfta, 13th-century mystic and namesake of St. Gertrude's Monastery, in Gertrude of Helfta: Companion for the Millennium by Sr. Evangela Bossert. Each chapter is a description of part of Gertrude's story, a description of one of her visions, and then a meditation on these for our own lives. Beginning with the Introduction, we are progressing chapter-by-chapter through the book. Each session is facilitated to stand alone but the greatest benefit will come through participating in each session. Reading the chapter in advance will prime participants for the day's discussion. For more information, please visit stgertrudes.org/diffusions/ or contact us at (208) 962-2000.

## SPIRITUALITY & THE ARTS

Art offers a sacred window through which we perceive God's invisible grace and encounter the holy. Bound together in community and healing hospitality, we serve as caretakers of the sacred mysteries of creation. We offer the gift of silence, time, and humility required for deep discernment. We long to help the God-given creativity in every person deepen and grow, remembering that lasting beauty springs from a heart and soul filled with grace. Work is underway on expanding our Artist in Residence Program at the CBL where the intersection of monasticism, Benedictine spirituality and creative practice continues to unfold. For over a decade, we have offered our artists-in-residence program with over 75 participants so far. The program seeks to build meaningful connections between contemplation and artistic expression, and we wish to invite anyone who is intrigued by this connection to begin to explore with us. Contact us and stay tuned! <https://stgertrudes.org/contact-us/>



Going back to the late 1940's and early 1950's, when I was a postulant and novice, the landscape at St. Gertrude's looked radically different than it does today. We raised our own beef cattle, milk cows, pigs, chickens, and we had bee boxes for honey. The monastery grounds contained orchards, large vegetable gardens and vast flower gardens.

I learned very early in my formation about stewardship: the care of our land, timber, animals and tools. In studying Chapter 32 of the Rule of St. Benedict, I learned that "The property of the monastery, whether it is tools, clothing or anything else, should be entrusted to members whom the superior appoints because of confidence in their manner of life." And in Chapter 31, "Let them regard all the vessels and goods of the monastery as if they were sacred vessels of the altar."

Though many things have changed and been modernized at the monastery over these many years, these principles in the Rule are reverently observed. We know we are only stewards of all that is ours and that we are responsible for their care and productivity.

-Edrea Eisenhauer, Koinonia of St. Gertrude's



## HISTORICAL MUSEUM: SOME ARTIFACTS CARRY QUESTIONS

*Carla Wilkins, Director*

The museum recently received a remarkable and somewhat mysterious addition: a plaster mask of Sister Mary

Theresa Gassner labeled as a "death mask," generously donated by Richard Sprute's children, Mary, Karen, Patrick and Gayle. The mask was originally owned by Richard's mother, Angelika Sprute, who was Sister Theresa's sibling.

Death masks—plaster casts taken shortly after death to preserve a person's likeness—were not a tradition at Saint Gertrudes. Sister Theresa passed in 1982, but this mask was signed by Sister Benita Hassler in 1981, so it raises some intriguing questions. Was it made directly from Sister Theresa at the time of her passing in 1982 and Sister Benita mislabeled the year as 1981? Or did the two women make the mask a year before Sr. Theresa's death but it was given to the family as a "death mask"? This seems more likely, but the story remains unknown.

What we do know is that Sister Theresa lived an extraordinary life. Born Maria Magdalena Gassner in 1882 in Flums, Switzerland, she came to the United States as a young woman and entered the Benedictine community in 1906. She went on to serve for sixty years as a teacher in Idaho and Washington, shaping generations of students in both parochial and public schools. Even in childhood, she expressed a clear sense of vocation, once telling a hermit at the age of three that she wished to become a sister. She was the first sister at St. Gertrude's to reach 100 years of age, passing shortly after that milestone birthday. Because she chose to continue to wear a habit after Vatican II, she is highlighted on our museum life platform by the coif machine.

The mask offers a rare and intimate connection to that long life of service. It is, to our knowledge, the only example of its kind associated with the Monastery, making it all the more significant. This piece is on exhibit where visitors can encounter both the artifact and the questions it carries. As is often the case in museum work, history does not always arrive with clear answers—but it always invites us to look closer.



## Historical Museum at St. Gertrude

Gift shop • Buckskin Bill • Polly Bemis • kids' activities • and more

*History is for everyone!*

**Open 9am to 4:30pm  
Monday – Saturday**

Adults \$6  
Students \$3  
Age 6 & under FREE

465 Keuterville Road, Cottonwood, Idaho | 208-962-2050  
[www.historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org](http://www.historicalmuseumatstgertrude.org)

## THE INN: HEALING HOSPITALITY

The Inn at St. Gertrude offers more than just a place to stay; it is an invitation into 'healing hospitality.' Every stay supports the mission of the Center for Benedictine Life. Experience the unique rhythm of monastic life at your own pace.



**BED & BREAKFAST**

208-451-4321  
[www.InnatStGertrude.com](http://www.InnatStGertrude.com)

## SOCIAL JUSTICE & GLOBAL PRAYER

The Center for Benedictine Life joins with the LCWR in supporting Pope Leo XIV's stance regarding the conflict in Iran. Please join us in prayer for an end to the conflicts in the Middle East, Ukraine, and an end to gun violence. We ask that you pray with us for the peace and wellbeing of all.