

Canticle of St. Gertrude

Fall 2026

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE

A Message from Prioress Sister Teresa Jackson



What does art have to do with Benedictine life? Art permeates our monastic life. Benedictine history and culture are deeply imbued with the arts. Monastics and lay people alike express their deepest sense of meaning, their longing for the transcendent and their vocation through creative work. Art is an essential part of our heritage.

These expressions permeate our Monastery. Entering the building, an icon of St. Gertrude the Great greets you, holding her book of mystical experiences and symbols of her visions. Down the hall, a gallery showcases changing artworks from friends of the community rooted in faith. Hallway statues offer tangible reminders of Christ and the saints. Our chapel itself is a work of art. In the altar's polished wood, the baldachin, the choir stalls and more, artisans transformed nature to create a space for prayer and worship through sacrament, song, and word.

For ten years, our "Artists in Residence" program has invited women to focus on their creative practice for a month. Since 2016, we have hosted over 80 visual artists, writers, musicians, playwrights, and more. They receive a room, studio space, and fully participate in community life. Recently, more young women apply who view their art as deeply connected to faith. At the residency's end, they share their work and their experience exploring the intersection of art and faith in a prayerful community. In turn, their passion inspires us.

Our spirituality & the arts program is not new; it is deeply embedded in Benedictine DNA.

In Memoriam: Fr. Meinrad Schallberger, OSB, April 3, 1938 – August 14, 2026



Born in Mt. Angel, Oregon, Joseph Schallberger entered Mt. Angel monastery and was ordained a priest in 1964 and given the name Meinrad. In 1982, he was assigned to Ascension Priory in Jerome, Idaho, a new foundation of Mt. Angel Abbey. For nearly a quarter- century as chaplain at the Monastery of St. Gertrude and St. Mary's Hospital, he became a deeply integrated and beloved presence, known for his gentleness, keen wit, and short, pithy sermons. Fr. Meinrad warmly embraced the local community cheering on Prairie High School sports, respecting the sisters' governance and values, and finding joy in tending the monastery's hillsides and woods. The happiest chapter of his adult life unfolded on the Camas Prairie, where he offered quiet pastoral care, shared an affectionate, mutual bond with his beloved cat Tuxedo, and left a lasting legacy of compassionate service. Rest in Peace, Father Meinrad.

OUR MISSION: Eager to welcome God's transforming power in ourselves and our world, we seek God together and respond with our core values: Healing Hospitality, Grateful Simplicity, Creative Peacemaking.

A Message from Executive Director Tim Oberholzer: Ben and the Art of Monastic Maintenance



"You want to know how to paint a perfect painting? It's easy. Make yourself perfect and then paint naturally." (from Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance by Robert M. Persig). Creative skills like painting, writing, or composing come naturally to some, yet few claim perfection. Perfection is elusive.

"You want to know how to live in a perfect world? It's easy. Make yourself perfect and then live naturally." Would St. Benedict say this? Spiritual arts like prayer, hospitality, and peacemaking come naturally to some, but no one is spiritually perfect. The Center for Benedictine Life exists to aid this work through the tools and model in the Rule of Benedict.

Community is the workshop for inner transformation. Members (Sisters, Oblates, Koinonia, employees, benefactors, retreatants, and guests) work daily on self-perfection through community.

In Chapter 4 of the Rule, Benedict offers 74 spiritual tools—not brushes or paper, but dispositions and practices to amend faults and safeguard love. Key tools include: honor everyone (4:8), act differently from the world (4:20), never give a hollow greeting of peace (4:25), do not grumble (4:39), place hope in God alone (4:41), and do not aspire to be called holy before you are (4:62).

Benedictine life is the art of becoming through surrender. The Rule erects a ladder of humility to ascend toward perfect love. Step by step, the spiritual artist learns to practice virtue naturally and without effort (7:67, 69) - a practice that never ends.



Our Community Celebrates Sr. Placida's Prestigious NOAA Award



Our community proudly celebrates Sister Placida Wemhoff, who received the John Campanius Holm Award from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Department of Commerce. This honors her 45 years of voluntary weather reporting in Cottonwood, providing crucial temperature and precipitation data. From her Camas Prairie upbringing to 30 years as an educator and her ongoing care of the monastery grounds, orchard, and book studio, we honor her decades of service and devotion.

Upcoming Retreats at the Spirit Center



October 21 ~ Diffusions (Zoom): St. Gertrude of Helfta: Companion for the Millennium with Dr. Samantha L. Miller (additional sessions in 2027: on 2/10, 3/24, 5/5, 9/8)

October 27 - 31, 2026 ~ The Letter: An Intimate Pilgrimage with Cheryl Johnson and Tim Oberholzer

November 5 - 8, 2026 ~ The Healing Power of Listening with Allen Tacke

January 8 - 10, 2027 ~ Sacred Reset: A Yoga Retreat for Body & Spirit with CC Horton

SpiritCenter.org (208) 962-2000

Spirituality & the Arts

Artist in Residence: Dana Hopper-Kelly

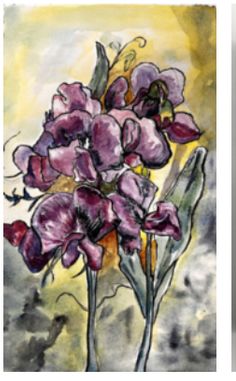
Dana Hopper-Kelly is used to a busy life. She teaches art and horticulture at Bishop Kelly High School in Boise, works in adaptive recreation, has two adult kids, and always has a long list of art projects underway. Looking for a chance to slow down, she joined a two-week Artists in Residence program at the Monastery in early summer.

Dana arrived at the monastery with structured plans and a lingering hustle-and-bustle mindset. Yet, monastic rhythm and nature quickly reshaped her stay. Expecting sunny summer weather, she instead encountered a week of steady rain. "It was such a blessing and it kept me inside," she reflected. "I loved having the big monastery windows open and then closing them when it got cooler or the wind was blowing." Eating breakfast in silence and singing psalms with the Sisters helped her relax. The slower pace of prayer gave her a deep sense of peace and presence. "We recite the words slower than we typically might," she noted. "The Sisters reminded me that might feel uncomfortable, but it never did. I needed that slowness and thoughtfulness. Prayer felt like 'the presence of Christ being there with us.'"

Growing up on a farm in Idaho, Dana has always seen the world with a sense of wonder. During her stay at St. Gertrude's, that wonder took root in close observation of nature and everyday objects. During healing walks in the meadow, she sketched landscapes, reflected, and welcomed gentle distractions, including a curious six-year-old child who mistook her quiet prayer for sleeping. Back in the studio space, these reflections transformed into five completed works, some based on photos she found in her own phone: a painting inspired by conversation with Sister Placida about wild sweet peas (plants that are toxic yet undeniably beautiful); a study of a bee with frayed wings, capturing a life lived with industry near its natural end; a painting of an urban praying mantis, inspired by a photograph she took of a mantis perched on a bolt in Moscow, Idaho (Dana said she imagined the creature inquiring, "I'm here... what next?"); a detailed painting from a photo of a male jumping spider on newsprint (the artist connected the spider's perch on the sports page with the surprising, playful delight the Sisters took in tracking sports scores and teams); and finally she crafted a tiny model of a monastery armchair out of a recycled energy drink can using a tin smithing technique. When Dana presented her artwork to the community at the end of her residency, she highlighted how each Sister seemed to have a specific chair in the monastery where they sought rest and comfort. Seeing their faces light up in recognition underscored a central Benedictine value: finding sacred comfort in the routines of daily life.

Now back in Boise, Dana carries that peace and comfort with her. The trip inspired her to consider leading a relaxing arts retreat to help others connect, while reminding her to keep space for simplicity and rest in her own life. "God wants me to take care of myself, and I can re-create that sense of ease and allow myself to slow down," Dana said. "I've shared a lot with my coworkers and my students about the sense of peace I had while I was there. I felt that I was frolicking with the Sisters. I wasn't physically frolicking with the Sisters, obviously, but being with them had such a sense of ease and simplicity and joy and wonder; they have such a great sense of humor."




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Sister Story:
Sister Karen Martin's Journey of Music, Faith, and Calling

For Sister Karen Martin, faith is grounded, practical, and tangible - expressed through organ keys, brass marches, and community life. "Music is what speaks to me spiritually. I pray with my fingers," she says. "Playing music is my way to God, not sitting around talking about spiritual stuff. I share with my music; I'm not much into words."

Her journey shows how God speaks to us individually through what we love. Sister Karen's connection to music began in Perham, Minnesota. Raised Lutheran, the formal services didn't capture her interest, but the choir loft did. "I was fascinated by the organ and the organist, a man named Orville Waltz," she recalls. "He played preludes and fugues and I just loved his playing, and I loved the marching rhythms of traditional Protestant hymns. I didn't much like church service itself, but I loved the organ music." By second grade, she was taking piano lessons; by sixth grade, she added clarinet.

In college, a bitter winter prompted a practical decision: she walked to the campus Catholic chapel instead of driving to the Lutheran church. "I enjoyed Mass and felt a transcendence capture me from the music. I was drawn to the formality," she says. "I had grown up Lutheran, but I was a bit of a renegade, so I went ahead my junior year, went to see the priest, and became a confirmed Catholic."

After college, Sister Karen served as a U.S. Air Force captain and nurse in Mississippi, South Korea, and Texas, followed by work with the VA and at a bush hospital in Alaska. Later, while working as a lab tech in Fairbanks, she began playing Episcopal hymns on an old chapel piano before work. When the chapel organist took leave, she stepped in.

Soon, she took music theory classes at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, played in the wind symphony, and served as main organist for the Catholic cathedral.

In her 50s, a quiet pull toward monastic life resurfaced. "I always wanted to live in community and be a part of something more than just a church or prayer group," she reflects. "I revisited these feelings in my 50s and thought, 'I think this might be a good time.'" She joined the Benedictine community at the Monastery of St. Gertrude, finding a place to live in community.

Today, her life is anchored by shared routines. She works in the business office, walks the monastery hill as a form of contemplative prayer, hosts game nights in the library, and shares meals with her sisters.

Music remains central to her daily contribution. As monastery organist, she plays for daily prayer and Mass. She also plays clarinet in the Idaho County Orchestra and manages its music library and plays alto saxophone in local outdoor concerts with the Camas Prairie Community Band. "We tend to play 'marchy stuff' which I love, plus some quieter, mellow pieces," she notes. "My music preferences have remained very stable since I was a child: hymns and marchy tunes."

One piece holds deep meaning: Frank Erickson's Air for Band. "To me, this is sacred. It transcends," Sister Karen shares. "The melody gives a sense of ecstasy; it's very uplifting." During a concert in Cottonwood, the band dedicated the piece to her with some of her Benedictine sisters supporting her in the audience.

Sister Karen lets her actions and music do the talking. In every note played, her fingers translate faith into sound.

"I Pray With My Fingers"

– Sr Karen Martin



Sr Karen and Koinonia Chris Roberts

Sr Karen





Jasmine Jones presenting to the Sisters and in the Guardian Angel Room

Artist in Residence: An Interview with Jasmine Jones

For many writers, finding time to dedicate to their art can be challenging, and it often happens in fragmented moments. During her month-long residency at the Monastery of St. Gertrude, writer Jasmine Jones found that landscape transformed. Guided by shared meals, morning and evening silence, and communal prayer, the monastery's rhythm provided structure for her work and a routine that helped her organize her time.

A typical day during Jasmine's residency unfolded with a natural, contemplative cadence. Mornings began with reading or journaling outside, followed by dedicated hours at her computer in the Guardian Angel room, looking out its vast window. After the midday meal, she walked up to the meadow to spend time in contemplation, a practice that naturally prepared her mind to return to her desk before evening prayer and supper. Throughout her month in Cottonwood, sanctuary revealed itself in unexpected forms: ordinary chores became peaceful refuge; washing dishes each evening turned into a meditative act where the repetitive motions and quiet sounds mirrored the inner rhythm of prayer.

Jasmine also learned a lot from Benedictine values, especially the importance of listening. She realized that to write good stories, a writer has to stop, pay attention, and truly listen to people. Being at the monastery showed her how helpful it is to slow down, simplify life, and step away from constant noise and phone screens. Having a simple routine made it much easier for her to sit down and create. Writing was her way of connecting with God and the world, just like the Sisters connect through their daily prayers and commitment to their community.

> "Each time I sit down to write, and something happens, I write a scene, character, or even just one sentence, it feels like such an impossible thing, a miracle. When I write, I feel I am reaching for something inside and outside the world. It makes sense to feel this way, because it is through this small act of my own creation that I feel able to be in deeper conversation with God and the rest of creation. This is also what I saw the Sisters pursuing every day through their discipline of prayer and commitment to each other and their community."

When her month-long stay came to a close, the greatest gift Jasmine carried home to her graduate program was a transformed perspective. Beyond her meadow walks and quiet mornings, it was the spirit of the community that left an enduring mark on her heart. Jasmine's time at the monastery offered her a lasting truth: all creation is meant to be deeply communal.

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Artist in Residence: Bonny Gorsuch

Our daily rhythm of prayer and hospitality offers sanctuary for all. For artist Bonny Gorsuch, her residency was a time of healing, faith, and transformation.

Five years prior, Bonny was diagnosed with stage 4 Metastatic Breast Cancer (MBC) with six months to live. Through grace and care, her condition moved from terminal to chronic. “My Artist in Residency at St Gertrude's was especially meaningful to me for many reasons. While there, I celebrated a very important milestone day. Five years previously, on May 26, 2021, I was informed that I had just 6 months to live because of stage 4 MBC: a malignant brain tumor had been discovered; also cancer was found in my breast, bones and lungs. I hadn't realized when applying for the Residency that I would be at the monastery on that significant day!”

After years of longing to apply for the residency while caring for her late husband, Richard, and navigating her health, Bonny found deep respite at St. Gertrude's. “It was such a gift to be pampered by the Sisters through delicious meal preparation, immaculate housekeeping, transportation rides and radiant kindness.”

Initially finding the schedule a disruption to her nonstop work habit, stopping for prayer soon became a blessing. “Looking back, I now realize that having to stop what I was working on turned out to be the most welcomed and refreshing moments. Today, I realize that it's OK to take a break along the way. The project will still be there waiting! I came to St. Gertrude’s in hopes of becoming a changed person: I can truly attest that I was changed.”

During her stay, Bonny created nine Wearable Art pieces featuring Blessed Mother Mary on the back. As a recent Catholic convert, working in silence deepened her devotion: “We definitely drew closer as I was touching her in fabric each day... I have come to perceive her as a key companion on my spiritual journey.”

Reflecting on her shift in mindset, she noted: “My mindset has changed in that earning the highest dollar for my work is no longer my highest priority... Now I'm in a different place in my life; one in which my uppermost goal each day is to stay happily grounded in the ways of the Lord. I no longer feel a need to impress others with my art; it turns out, I don't have to impress God either!”

Returning to Portland, Bonny carries forward these lessons of intentionality and calm: “My time at St Gertrude's gave me new perspective on how I want to live my remaining years,” Bonny shared. “I'm attempting to live like the Sisters do,more and more each day. I hope my art reflects that joy, peace and happiness.”



Bonny Gorsuch



Sr Margie modeling Bonny's work

A Message from Spirit Center Director Sr. Betty Schumacher



Sister Thérèse of Lisieux said, “You cannot go into someone else's closet and wear their clothes.” This is equally true of prayer and spirituality; each person has a unique way of praying that reflects his/her spirituality.

One of the great gifts of working at Spirit Center is that I can observe and at times be a part of different retreats. I love watching watercolor and iconography sessions as designs emerge into masterpieces. A year ago, an iconography retreatant shared how writing her icon revealed negative influences in her life, leading her to pursue healthier choices. Creating art often sparks an inner journey of transformation.

Retreatants find that the silence and view of the prairie from the Spirit Center art room create a sacred space to explore creativity, encouraging them to deepen their spirituality and connection with God, nature, and others.

Artist in Residence: Emma Tacke

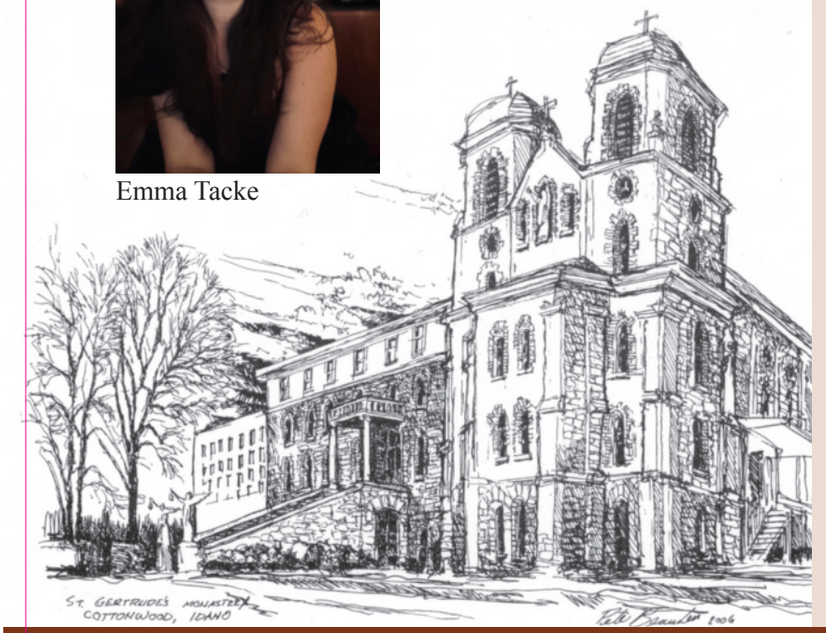
When writer Emma Tacke came to the Monastery of St. Gertrude for her residency, she found a peaceful routine of quiet hours, shared meals, and daily prayer. This simple environment helped her step away from daily home distractions and write with focus.

Her stay was marked by a special connection. Emma spent long hours writing in the Guardian Angel room, surrounded by the book collection of the late Sr. Mary Forman, a former prioress who had been Emma's college professor and spiritual mentor. Having lost touch before Sr. Mary passed away in 2023, Emma felt her mentor's presence among the shelves, which inspired her to write a poem created entirely from Sr. Mary's book titles. In that same quiet room, Emma also celebrated her 33rd birthday, calling it the most peaceful birthday she had ever had.

When it was time to leave, Emma packed a few fun souvenirs, including a two-headed pig keychain from the museum gift shop and handmade soap from Sr. Carlotta Fontes' apothecary. More than anything, she left with deep gratitude for the kindness of the sisters, oblates, and staff. The experience renewed her love for community and reminded her that she is happiest when she is creating.



Emma Tacke



33 by Emma Tacke

I turn back and reach for my
old selves.

Like a chain of paper dolls, 32 of
them stand behind me, connected
at the hands.

Their edges, soft and wilted from
years in my pocket, my purse, the
worn pages of my journals.

I hold them, gentle like a mother,
and trace the outline of their
perfect, crooked faces.

I spread them slowly, an accordion
with no sound.

The distance between who I was
and who I am becoming is still
un-quantifiable.

And how could I have ever doubted
the sanctity of all these years?

And what each one has given me?

Indestructible, triumphant,
transcendent.

I beg life to oblige me one
more time,

To forgive all my habits and polish
once more the potential.

The future is galloping towards me.

My new self, wind screaming
through her hair, reaches down,
arms straining to grasp me.

And I, always willing, lift up.

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A Message from Museum Director Carla Wilkins: Preserving Our Past: How the Museum Brings History Back to Life



Preserving history is an ongoing effort to rescue lost words and record living memories. Work is underway to ensure monastery stories remain accessible.

This year, we brought out-of-print books back to life. The 1996 book, Reminiscences of the John J. H. Uhlenkott Family and of Mr. Henry Forsmann, Sr. (compiled by Norbert Uhlenkott from 1930s Echo publications), was edited by Julie Bethman and printed. Additionally, Sr. Alfreda's 1966 revised work, A Flora of the Camas Prairie Region, has been reproduced. Both are available in our gift shop and online.

We are also capturing oral history before it fades. A new book, Inside the Monastery, releases next summer, offering a walking tour paired with sisters' memories. Sister Carolyn Miguel (1931–2015) recalled arriving in the 1980s as a "sister mom" with her daughter Nan:"I had three children all grown up, one being my daughter Nan. In the 1980s one of the sisters from Saint Gertrude, who worked with my daughter, invited her up to see the Monastery because Nan was interested in becoming a sister. My daughter asked if she could bring me, so I traipsed along behind her. I immediately fell in love with the place; with everything. I remember going up the front steps and there was this little woman, all dressed in black, who answered the door with a frown on her face and said, 'What can I do for you?' Well, this was pretty awkward you know. She ushered us into this front room. It was dark and very old. My daughter immediately withdrew and said, 'No, it's not for me.' But me? I was loving every minute of it."



Monastery Book Parlor.

Through digitizing texts and recording oral histories, such as this one, the museum keeps our heritage vibrant and enduring.



Do you have a desire to explore the intersection of Spirituality and the arts? Are you a former artist in residence? Would you like to gather with like-minded folk? We'd love to hear from you! Please contact Carrie Barton at cbarton@stgertrudes.org or (208) 962-5060.

inn at St. Gertrude



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