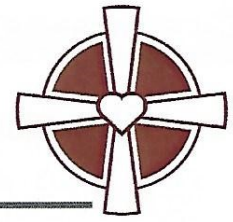


The Gleaner



An occasional newsletter of the Federation of St. Gertrude

Number 70 ♦ December 2018

Message from the President by Sr. Jeanne Weber

As I related in the last edition of *The Gleaner*, my travels in June included a trip to House of Bread Monastery in Nanaimo to get to know the sisters there. While there, the sisters took me to Cathedral Grove, an old growth forest near Nanaimo. What amazed me about these Red Cedars and Douglas Firs was not just their age and size, but the fact that when they die, they become in effect “nursery trees.” As they decay, new trees begin to grow out of them. We saw new little saplings growing out of fallen logs, as well as maturing trees with roots embedded in the stumps of dead trees.

What a wonderful image of the Paschal Mystery, and perhaps for our experience as monastic communities in this time and place. That a beautiful ancient tree (they can live over 1000 years) had to die is a difficult reality. Yet out of death comes new life. The new life is not the old tree coming back to life, but a *new* tree.

A few years ago, I read Elizabeth Johnson’s book [Ask the Beasts](#). In it, she brings the theory of evolution into dialogue with the tenets of the Christian faith. I came away from that book with a very strong sense that our concept of death as punishment for sin needs some nuancing. In one sense, it is true that sin does bring death. We see that piece of the truth so tragically in our world today. The sin of greed and over-consumption brings death not only to other human beings, but to the whole of creation. If, however, death is considered from the perspective of evolution, in which the dying of one form of life creates the possibility of a new form of life emerging, our viewpoint on death shifts. A refusal to cling inordinately to my own (or our own) life, a willingness to let go to make room for a new life form, can be a powerfully life-giving act.



Cathedral Grove Forest nurse tree
Photo by S. Barbara Rinehart

In innumerable cases, the good seeds planted by our communal lives of prayer and work throughout the decades are already bringing forth new life that we are able to see. In other cases, the form that new life might take is hidden from us. We may be called to deep and unseeing trust in God, as we cry out with the crucified Christ, “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me” (Mt. 27:46)?

Sometimes we may be called to work actively to discern and facilitate the newly emerging form of life. Teresa Jackson from Cottonwood has written an insightful essay entitled, “Recognizing New Forms of Benedictine Life” in the Spring/Summer 2018 issue of [Benedictines](#), in which she calls us to see the new life right in front of us in the form of our oblate members.

At other times we may need to step back and allow God to bring forth that new life, without so much effort on our part. Simón Pedro Arnold told such a story of the rebirth of his own monastic community in his LCWR keynote address. I share this excerpt:



President's Schedule

- December 9-14: Mount Angel—Pastoral Visit
- January 31-February 6: Rapid City—Pastoral Visit
- February 19-26: Cullman—Conference of Prioresses
- March 19-23: Madison—Federation Council
- April 2-7: Fort Smith—Election
- April 11-15: Richardton—Election

To log into the Federation website

www.federationofstgertrude.org

In the middle of the home page, you'll see a box that says "Login for Federation Members." Click this button and enter this information:

User name: fedmember Password: Gertrude2013

You can now click on "Member Files" to access the directory, other Federation documents, and past issues of *The Gleaner*

Message from President, cont.

For those in the ministry of leadership in religious life, the increasing fragility of institutions, persons and communities is almost always seen as a dying. We tend to respond urgently, with attempts to compensate, to rescue: aggressive vocational outreach, emergency appeals to associates, etc. Would this be a gospel attitude?



Ruins of Tintern Abbey, Wales

From my own personal and community experience, I can testify to the contrary. First, in spite of opposing advice from the "wise," my local community chose to place itself in an extremely harsh environment in terms of climate, altitude, poverty and a culture quite resistant to Christian discourse. We consciously opted for vulnerability. Little did we know to what extent the Lord was going to take us seriously.

After a few years of apparent vocational fecundity, our entire institutional dream collapsed. Only two monks remained, looking at each other, asking "What do we do now?" We decided to trust, and we stayed. Out of this liminal fragility emerged the most prophetic experience of Providence. And we had done nothing to "save" a sinking ship.

Good news came by itself from places we did not expect. A recently married young couple appeared, wanting to share our adventure. Later, various women arrived and wanted to pitch their tents in our midst, requiring our unprecedented creativity in forming a mixed, contemplative Benedictine community.

Today, we continue to be more vulnerable than ever while also sensing a surprising vitality, in that "different" way of the Triune God, so beyond our mental categories.

The ministry of leadership is to believe, trust and permit the providential and surprising fruitfulness of fragility... not to resist it. (from "The Mystery of the Incarnation: Revelation of the Triune God as a Vulnerable God." Brother Simón Pedro Arnold, OSB. LCWR Assembly – 8/10/18 – St. Louis, MO.)

I write these reflections as I ponder a question I've heard from more than one sister in more than one monastic community facing the issue of whether or not they can realistically attract, mentor, and sustain new membership. That question is posed as some form of "But why would we want to die?" I wonder how it might change things if movement toward the completion of our monastic communities were regarded not as a disaster, but rather as a sacrificial act of love and trust, an unstinting entry into the paschal mystery. What if we were to believe, really believe, in the promise of God that new life *has, is, and will* grow out of our willingness to share in the death of Jesus, not just as individuals, but as monastic communities. "Hope is not hope if its object is seen, for who hopes for what is seen, but if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience" (Rom 8:24-25).



Watertown Transformative Visioning

Our community of Mother of God is involved in long-range planning. Who isn't? For a couple of years now we have been working with Drs. Ted Dunn & Beth Lipsmeyer, of St. Louis, with their C.A.R.E. (Conversational Approach to Relational Effectiveness) program. This program gave us new ways of handling past hurts and misunderstandings and especially important, it taught us how to prepare for these conversations – doing our own inner work to claim our own part in what had happened. In doing the inner work, we often discovered how we were *reacting* out of our own woundedness instead of *responding* in an immediate, clear, concise and direct way to the altercation at hand. This time of growth has changed our community for the better, giving us a way to face the future with more grace and peace.



We have now begun to delve into “Transformative Visioning.”

While this is in progress, with Ted and Beth’s assistance, we are planning for the future with the Hoffman Group out of Appleton, WI, and Wipfli Insights in Westchester, IL, who have gathered information through market research, a community needs assessment and a health assessment for each of our sisters. Needless to say, all of this involves many meetings.



One of the outcomes of our many discussions was a Charette – a gathering of persons who have common interests. We, along with representatives from other religious communities, gathered in Sioux Falls in early November to discuss how we might collaborate on the care of our sisters.

Transformative Visioning is the name of the process we are using from Ted Dunn with additions from our Benedictine documents, the Rule of Benedict, and other reflections suggested by our sisters. This inner work has become our ongoing formation for a couple of years. Meeting in small groups we are using the guide which offers a series of reflections, prayers, and exercises that invites us to explore the inner landscapes of our souls. As stated in Ted’s book, “Only you can attest to the authenticity of God’s presence in your inner journey, and how this informs the paths you are choosing, the decisions you are making and whether or not you are making any progress.”

O Come, O Come
Emmanuel!



Sister Mele Rakai (r) was happily received into the Novitiate in Winnipeg by Sister Virginia Evard, prioress (l) Sister Mary Coswin, formation director, (middle) and community on Oct. 28, 2018. Mele, born in Fiji is from Calgary, AB.





Madison Holy Wisdom Receives \$1 Million Grant

by Pamela Johnson, Sunday Assembly member and Oblate class of 2013 and Rachel Olson, foundation project manager

We have exciting news to share with you! The sisters were awarded a \$1 million grant over five years to support the creation of an Ecumenical Center for Clergy Spiritual Renewal (ECCSR) at Holy Wisdom Monastery. The grant is part of Lilly Endowment, Inc.'s Thriving in Ministry Initiative.

The purpose of the ECCSR is to offer spiritual renewal to pastors from a wide range of Christian denominations through two



immersion experiences. Focusing on the spiritual practices of silence, listening with the ear of the heart, Liturgy of the Hours, study (Lectio Divina), Sunday ecumenical worship, centering prayer and work, each immersion aims to support clergy in renewing their spiritual practice and their sense of call to pastoral ministry. In addition the ECCSR will create a monastery without walls that will strengthen relationships among clergy, sustain clergy spiritual vitality, and offer support for the cultivation of spiritual depth and renewal within their congregations.

Sister Mary David Walgenbach speaks for the whole community when she says: "Since opening our retreat and guest house more than 50 years ago, many individuals and groups from a variety of faith backgrounds have come here for spiritual renewal. Our mission weaves prayer, hospitality, justice, and care for the earth into a shared way of life. Giving back what we've been given, our intent is to help clergy thrive in their ministry by nourishing the 'monk within.' The receipt of this grant to establish an Ecumenical Center for Clergy Spiritual Renewal is a great blessing to us and to those who will arrive. We are deeply grateful."

Holy Wisdom Monastery is one of 78 organizations located in 29 states that is taking part in the initiative. The organizations reflect diverse Christian traditions: mainline and evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox. Thriving in Ministry is part of Lilly Endowment's grantmaking to strengthen pastoral leadership in Christian congregations in the United States. This has been a grantmaking priority at Lilly Endowment for nearly 25 years.

As time unfolds, we hope that many, many people from our community of communities will be involved in the ministry of the new Ecumenical Center for Clergy Spiritual Renewal. You are invited to tell us how you'd like to be part of what needs doing!

Fort Smith News

- * On December 8, 2018, St. Scholastica will have its annual bake sale. Cookies, breads, cakes, pies, jellies, and more will be available.
- * St. Scholastica now has a new member: Postulant Thao Nguyen. Please join in welcoming this lovely and talented woman to our community!

It's Heavenly. It's Decadent. It's Back!

St. Scholastica Monastery's Annual Bake Sale!

<i>Cookies</i>	<i>Breads</i>	<i>Cakes</i>	<i>Candy</i>
<i>Jellies</i>	<i>Vinegars</i>	<i>Pies</i>	

And So Much More! Oh my!

Come and eat your heart out!

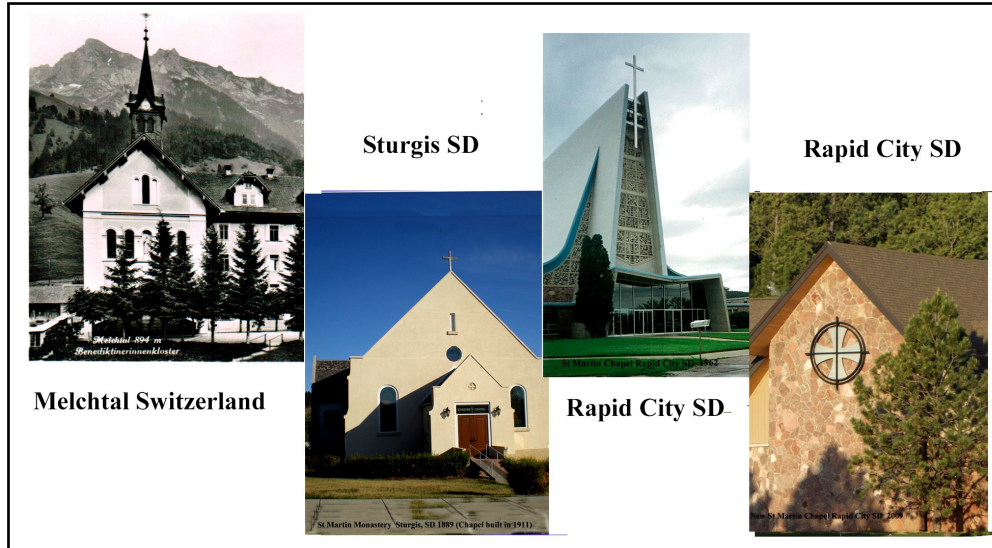
Trinity Dining Room
1205 S. Albert Pike Avenue
Trinity Entrance
December 8, 2018
8 AM - 2 PM

*Cookies priced by weight
Arrive early for the best
goodies.
Don't forget to tell your
friends!*



Rapid City

Aging and Abundant Needs; Wild and Crazy Ideas!



In May of this year we had a planning workshop. This was facilitated by Sister Kerry O'Reilly from St. Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph, Minnesota. As a result of the workshop we have three goals and some "wild and crazy ideas." The first goal is "Aging and Abundant Needs, Goal: be prepared as Sisters' capacities change." The second and third goals relate to leadership and to accepting new members. We have a tentative time line for working on the goals. "Aging and Abundant

Needs" is being worked on in the summer and fall of 2018. At our last community meeting we looked at the "Wild and Crazy" ideas.

Even as we look at "Aging and Abundant Needs" we are grateful for many blessings. We have had abundant moisture this summer. Our fruit trees have an abundance of pears and plums. We have abundant guests and retreatants. We are blessed with a guest from Chile for three months. Her name is Pamela Villalobos and she is a friend of Sister Yvette. She is learning English while she is here. Father John Lule from Uganda who spent many months recuperating here last year returned for a visit. Our present monastery is a great blessing. As I am writing this we are preparing to celebrate the ninth anniversary of the blessing of the chapel.

Our present chapel is the last of the four chapels pictured. The first one is the chapel of the Sisters in Melchtal, Switzerland, our founding monastery. Our chapel in Sturgis and the chapel at the monastery from which we moved in 2009 are also portrayed. We are grateful for the past as we plan for the future.

Cottonwood Benedictine Co-housing Endeavor

On June 11, 2018, the members of the Chapter voted to go forward into our future with two major projects. In April of the previous year, several women--oblates, friends of the monastery and Sisters Teresa Jackson, Janet Barnard and Mary Forman—met to talk about a new initiative, that of a Benedictine co-housing endeavor for single women interested in living Benedictine spirituality. Cohousing is a type of living arrangement in which a group of people agrees to live in close proximity for the purpose of creating intentional community. For our community this dream was in response to the awareness that the community needed to make fuller utilization of its space as the community is becoming smaller.

Over the course of the year, members of the cohousing exploratory committee formed into small groups to explore various aspects of what forming a cohousing community might mean. The groups were clustered around the following issues: legal, working with the cenobitic community, recruitment and screening, building community, Benedictine structure (leadership identity), finances, renovation, and independent living issues. Committees were asked to select leadership and focus areas and frequency of meeting (via ZOOM and other vehicles). At the October 28, 2017 Chapter meeting, a few of the cohousing committee members sat at tables with the Sisters to be listeners to any questions and concerns about co-housing.

What began as an idea to renovate one floor of the Annex (the section of the monastery used for bedrooms) for cohousing residents shifted when it was determined in March 2018 that the pipes in the whole of the Annex were old and corroding



Cottonwood, cont.

and to put in new pipes would require tearing up the asbestos-tile floors. We called this the “pipe bomb.” So instead of one floor, all four floors of the bedroom area would require renovation.

Several weeks of meetings, consultations with architects and contractors to determine cost, and surfacing questions and concerns of the Sisters followed. Part of the process of consultation and information sharing with the Sisters entailed a session on issues

and concerns, followed by a listening session where Sisters’ questions and concerns could be aired. In April the sharing and listening sessions dealt with renovation; in May those sessions were focused on cohousing. JoAnne Zimmer, an oblate and volunteer,



JoAnne Zimmer, Oblate; Mary Forman, OSB, Prioress; Kathy McFaul, friend of the monastery; Edrea Eisenhaurer, friend of the monastery; Charlene Bunch, Oblate; Theresa Jackson, OSB.

with experience in construction, has taken the lead in consultations with architects and contractors and preliminary designs of suites for the cohousing floor and changing bedrooms on two other floors to have bathrooms.

Cohousing is intended for single women (without pets or dependents), who want to live in the monastery for the purpose of creating and living community, based on Benedictine values. They will commit to creating guidelines for community living, e.g. leadership, chores, expectations, conflict resolution. They will be expected to pay a monthly financial contribution, based on average cost of living in the surrounding area. Guidelines will address the process of when residents can no longer live independently because of medical issues. The rationale for trying this endeavor include having women committed to living Benedictine life in our monastery in a time of fewer vocations to professed religious life; being a source of income for the cenobitic community; utilizing space in the monastery; having a source of new energy and commitment of women living in our space; showing our ability to be creative, risk-taking and willing to try new things; and ensuring that the Monastery of St. Gertrude continues to be “a place for Benedictine spirituality.”

There is need for on-going conversations regarding housing of the Sisters when construction begins in late fall 2020 and all the details of moving. In addition, the personnel in the Development Office have plans for raising the funds for the renovation and have already begun asking donors for assistance.

The whole process of coming to the decision is one of discernment, that is, listening and responding to questions and concerns, placing the chapter meeting discussion in the context of prayer and the actual votes on renovation and cohousing in the context of prayer. While these decisions will call for a lot of change and moving, they offer the opportunity for us to practice *conversatio* and simplifying our lives as we divest of stuff, to make room for people and a new way to live together.



Five Members of the Federation of St. Gertrude Attend CIB Symposium

Five members of the Federation of St. Gertrude attended the 8th International Symposium of the CIB (*Communio Internationalis Benedictarum*) at San Anselmo in Rome, September 6-13, 2018. Sr. Jennifer Mechtild Horner of Beech Grove attended as a CIB delegate. Srs. Jeanne Weber and Patricia Ann Toscano from Yankton were the liturgists for the event. Sr. Mary Coswin of Winnepeg attended as a Federation Council Member (in Sr. Jeanne's stead), and Sr. Terri Hoffman of Watertown was drawn as an "at large" participant from the U.S.

The theme of the symposium was "Let All be Welcomed as Christ." Several keynote speeches on various aspects of hospitality were given by Benedictines from around the world. Highlights included a trip to Monte Cassino, a private audience with Pope Francis, and a lovely day at Subiaco, where we celebrated Mass and renewed our monastic profession. At the conclusion of the symposium, Sr. Lynn McKenzie, president of the Federation of St. Scholastica, was elected as the new CIB moderator. She succeeds Sr. Judith Ann Heble from Lisle. Let us keep her in our prayers.

Below we share comments on the experience from those who attended from our federation.

Mary Coswin: I was blessed to be selected to attend the *Communio Internationalis Benedictinarum* held in Rome Sept. 6-14th. What an inspiring occasion, not just to be in Rome but among 100+ Benedictine nuns and sisters from all over the world. The hospitality of the monks of Sant' Anselmo was generous and gracious. Singing together as we prayed was a blessing, "sisters and brothers in unity". Homemade bread and buns each day, pasta and wine at lunch and dinner, singing and praying in five languages, inspiring women-what could be grander.



The Americanos at the CIB: Karen Brink, Pittsburg; Linda Romey, Erie, Lynn McKenzie, Cullman; Hanna Vanorney, Bismarck; Jennifer Horner, Beech Grove, Andrea Westkamp, Bristow, Aileen Bankemper, Covington; Terri Hoffman, Watertown, Mary Coswin, Winnipeg; Roberta Bussan, Rock Island; Kerry O'Reilly, St. Joseph; Judith Heble, Lisle, Christine Ereiser, Tulsa. Not pictured: Jeanne Weber and Patricia Ann Toscano, Yankton; Dawn Mills, Clyde; and Mary Jane Vergoth, Erie.



Srs. Mary and Jeanne in the workroom for the planning team.

Terri Hoffman: It was a wonderful experience to meet sisters from around the world and hear their experiences as they live the Benedictine life. Praying together in many languages stretched all of us and the rituals planned by S. Jeanne and S. Patricia Ann were inspiring. To visit the origins of our community in Switzerland was another highlight of my trip.

Jennifer Mechtild Horner:

Attending the CIB Meeting and Symposium was an experience of a lifetime. As we gathered for the Opening Ritual, I was struck by the diversity among us. And yet, even though we looked different and

came from different regions, we were one in Christ and in the spirit of Benedict. We were each assigned a table to sit at for the whole Symposium. At my table there was a sister from Nigeria, Germany, Sweden and Czechoslovakia. What an enriching experience we had as we reflected on the presentations and how we could take what we heard back to our own



CIB cont.

monasteries. A highlight of course, was meeting Pope Francis! He was as joyful



Sr. Mary with the banner from Region 7, received at the closing ritual, at which we were commissioned to pray for the sisters from Poland, the Ukraine, and Lithuania.

and real as I expected. We all enjoyed being in his presence. Sr. Judith Ann Heble and the planning team did an amazing job of planning the Symposium. I hope they know of the gratitude we all have for the gift of their leadership. I will be forever grateful for the opportunity and the experience of attending the Symposium and hold it in a special place in my heart. And now, when I pray for Benedictines around the world, particular faces come to mind.

Jeanne Weber: It was wonderful to get to know so many sisters from all over the world. What was amazing to me was that our language differences didn't pose a barrier to communication, especially of our good will toward one another. The name, *Communio Benedictinarum Internationalis*, was borne out in the true communion we experienced in the days we were together.

Patricia Ann Toscano: The gathering of Benedictine women from all over the world is an amazing experience; one I wish everyone could experience. Being part of the team was a great experience, too. I feel now that I have Benedictine friends all over the world. We are all unique communities: color and style of habits, language, even the "doing" part of Liturgy. But, our presence and the spirit of our prayer and ability to have a great time together in work and play is definitely the same Benedictine spirit.



Sr. Jennifer Mechtild taking a break in the courtyard.



Sr. Patricia Ann in the Aula, the nave of the church, which was our meeting hall.

Below: Federation Council at work in and at play in Winnipeg: Sisters Mary Luke Jones, Jeanne Weber, Mildred Busch (secretary), Teresa Jackson, Barbara Lynn Schmitz and Shawn Carruth. Mary Coswin is taking the pictures.

