

# On Pilgrimage ...

## *in your own backyard*

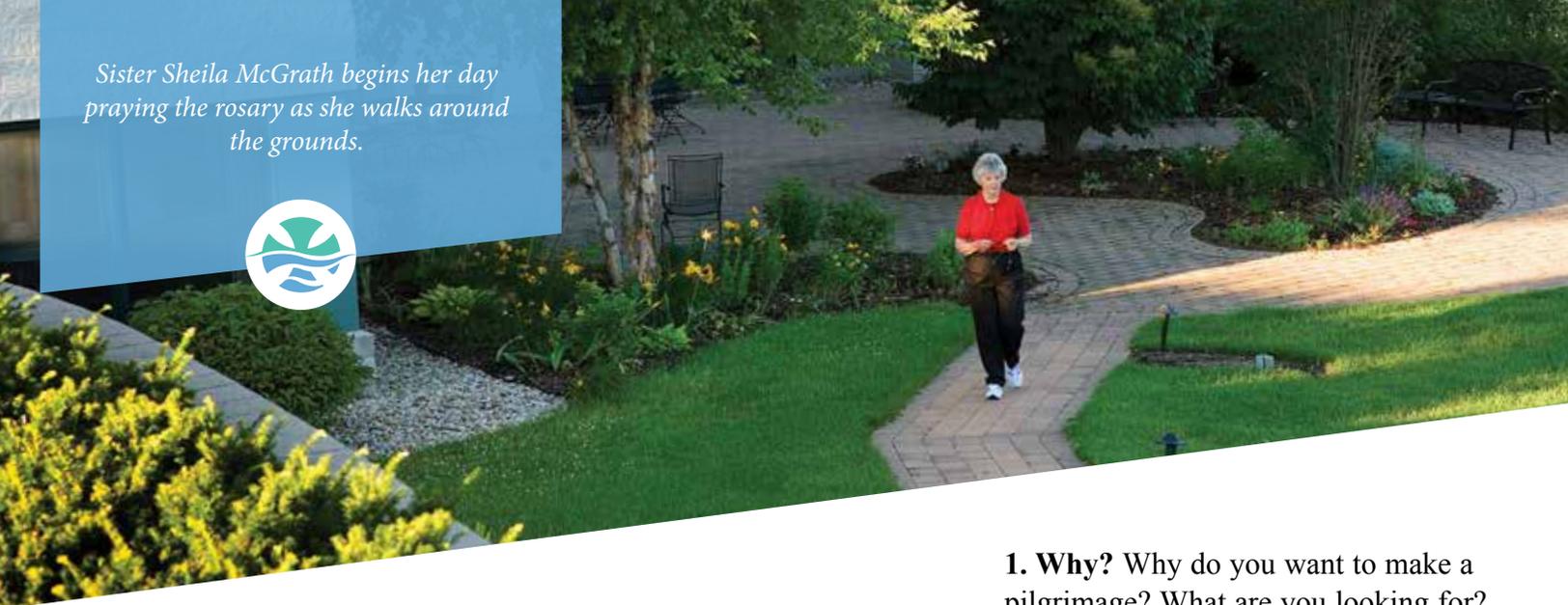
*Many of us feel a longing for ... more. Call it a deeper connection with the Divine. Life's meaning. Purpose.*

*Pilgrimage is a time-honored response to that universal if indefinable longing. Whether journeying through the Holy Land or walking the Camino, seekers have been moving along well-worn paths for thousands of years. ▶*



**Connecting  
Point**

*Sister Sheila McGrath begins her day praying the rosary as she walks around the grounds.*



Few, though, have the resources to make such a grand pilgrimage. Money and time are often in short supply, and physical stamina may fall short. Fortunately there is another alternative. Pilgrimage in your own backyard or even living room.

The Benedictine Sisters offer insights, tips and ideas for you to consider.

### **Pilgrimage requires intention.**

Although pilgrimage can come on you by surprise – a walk might turn into an unexpected spiritual experience that becomes deeply meaningful – it’s most often a journey that requires both intention and planning, no matter where you do it.

“Sometimes people want to solve a problem or develop a deeper relationship with God, and sometimes they want to progress in the spiritual life,” Sister Marianne Burkhard says. “Lots of people go on pilgrimage when they are wrestling with something.”

Others go on pilgrimage because they feel drawn to do so, willing to discover the real “why” of their trek as they walk. Regardless of the stated reason, pilgrimage requires intentional openness to inner change. It requires a mindset of commitment to the journey and process, come what may.

### **Pilgrimage requires a plan.**

First, dedicate a notebook or diary to your pilgrimage, and use it consistently. Reflection will be key to your experience! Next, develop your pilgrimage plan – your travel guide – by answering the following questions. Write your answers on the first few pages of your pilgrim journal.

**1. Why?** Why do you want to make a pilgrimage? What are you looking for? What do you want to learn, or change? Write your goal on the first page of your pilgrimage journal, and review it along the way. Reflect on how it changes or is strengthened as time goes on.

**2. Where?** Where will you go? Choose a “path” you can commit to. Will it be a walk in a neighborhood? A visit to the cemetery? A home-based activity? Create your route.

**3. When?** When will you make your pilgrimage? How long will it last? Will it be just one day, or a whole week? Will it last seven days in a row, or one hour per day for a month? Build in plenty of time for silent reflection.

**4. What?** What will you do to track your inner journey along the way? Will you say a prayer, write a poem, sketch a drawing, or reminisce at every “stop”? Will you write reflections as you go, or save your writing for the end of each day? Determine a menu of the actions you will take as you go.

### **Now, hit the road!**

As the ancient ammas and abbas of the desert said, “Go into your cell and your cell will teach you everything.” ▶

In other words, don't look outside for wisdom. It's within you. A pilgrimage helps unlock that wisdom, whether by foot, car or chair. Your journey - literal or metaphorical - will unfold in a way that is unique to you. Here are some suggestions for where to go and what to do. Follow the steps above to help ensure your Bon Voyage!

### Sit in your own chair.

Chair pilgrimages begin the same way as movement-based journeys, with intention and plan. To choose your home-based activity, consider what you are most drawn to. Slow and reflective reading of Holy Scripture? A spiritual book? A story that shares another pilgrim's path? Reminiscing about your life's experiences, perhaps by browsing through photo albums or reading old diaries? Watching spiritual movies?

You might start each day's journey with contemplative prayer, using Centering Prayer (see page 8), Lectio Divina, or the rosary to quiet yourself and set your intention.

### How to pilgrimage with photos.

Browsing through a photo album from your past, ask yourself the following questions:

What photos are you lingering over?

Which ones touch your heart most deeply? Why are you drawn to them?

What are they calling forth from you?

How do you sense God in them?

The pilgrimage is in the finding, recognizing and identifying those feelings.

~ Sister Susan Hutchens

Then, comfortable in your chair with phone off and pilgrimage materials – travel guide, journal, sketch pad, pen and tea – nearby, begin.

### Walk meditatively.

Sister Catherine Cleary doesn't hesitate when asked what she would suggest for a backyard pilgrimage. ▶



### Letter from the Prioress

*Sr. Sandra Brunenn, OSB*

We thank God that spring has arrived. This winter we had over 50" of snow, causing disruptions for everyone. For myself, it meant the postponement of half of the sessions scheduled for a book group studying "Creation and the Cross" by Elizabeth Johnson. Our small group of dedicated learners kept rescheduling, but we finally completed our sessions.

Johnson explores Jesus' life, death, and Resurrection and presents a "theology of accompaniment." She proposes that the core meaning of Jesus is the revelation that the living, saving God is present in all moments of our lives – even the bleakest – and that God is present as well in all elements of creation. It is a challenging and stimulating read that I recommend.

In this issue of Connecting Point we suggest making a pilgrimage. As you consider this practice, remember that in every step of your journey God is present. This is the heart of our Resurrection Faith! I consider, too, the millions of people today who are forced to become pilgrim people due to war, poverty, and insecurity.

At our daily Liturgy of the Hours we embrace you and all pilgrims, entrusting them to our God.

Easter Blessings!

“Walking and prayer have been combined in my life,” she says. “My family had a big yard with sidewalks going in different directions. I would walk them, and stop to sit on a step to pray. When I was a postulant, I joined the other postulants and novices every day to say the rosary as we walked. Here in Rock Island, (my sister) Audrey and I used to walk the monastery grounds together, stopping to sit inside the bell tower to talk and pray.”

Walking, she says, invites a meditative stance if you practice awareness of your surroundings.

“Walking keeps you mindful of the presence of God,” Sr. Catherine says. “Jesus must have walked with the disciples a lot. He was always walking to the lake, up a hill, from one town to the next.”

Jesus figures in other biblical walks, including the walk to Emmaus. Sister Mary Schmidt says it’s a useful theme for any pilgrimage.

“Everyone you meet is Jesus Christ,” she says. “Notice the people you meet. Notice the beauty. Ask yourself, Where is God in this?”

## Walk a labyrinth.

Evidence of ancient labyrinths can be found around the globe, on coins, hilltops and cathedral floors. Eventually, Christians adopted the labyrinth as a pilgrimage substitute, following their trademark one-way-in, one-way-out path.

Labyrinths are not mazes. They twist and turn, go backward and forward, but never stop in a dead end. Labyrinth pilgrims say they are like life that way.

## How to walk meditatively.

Try praying very short prayers as you walk. Sometimes the shorter the prayer, the better. You don’t get tangled up with words that way.

Each footstep can be a word. My grandfather used “Jesus Mercy.” I can still hear him. Centering Prayer (p. 8) is another option.

Try using a walking stick to steady and balance yourself.

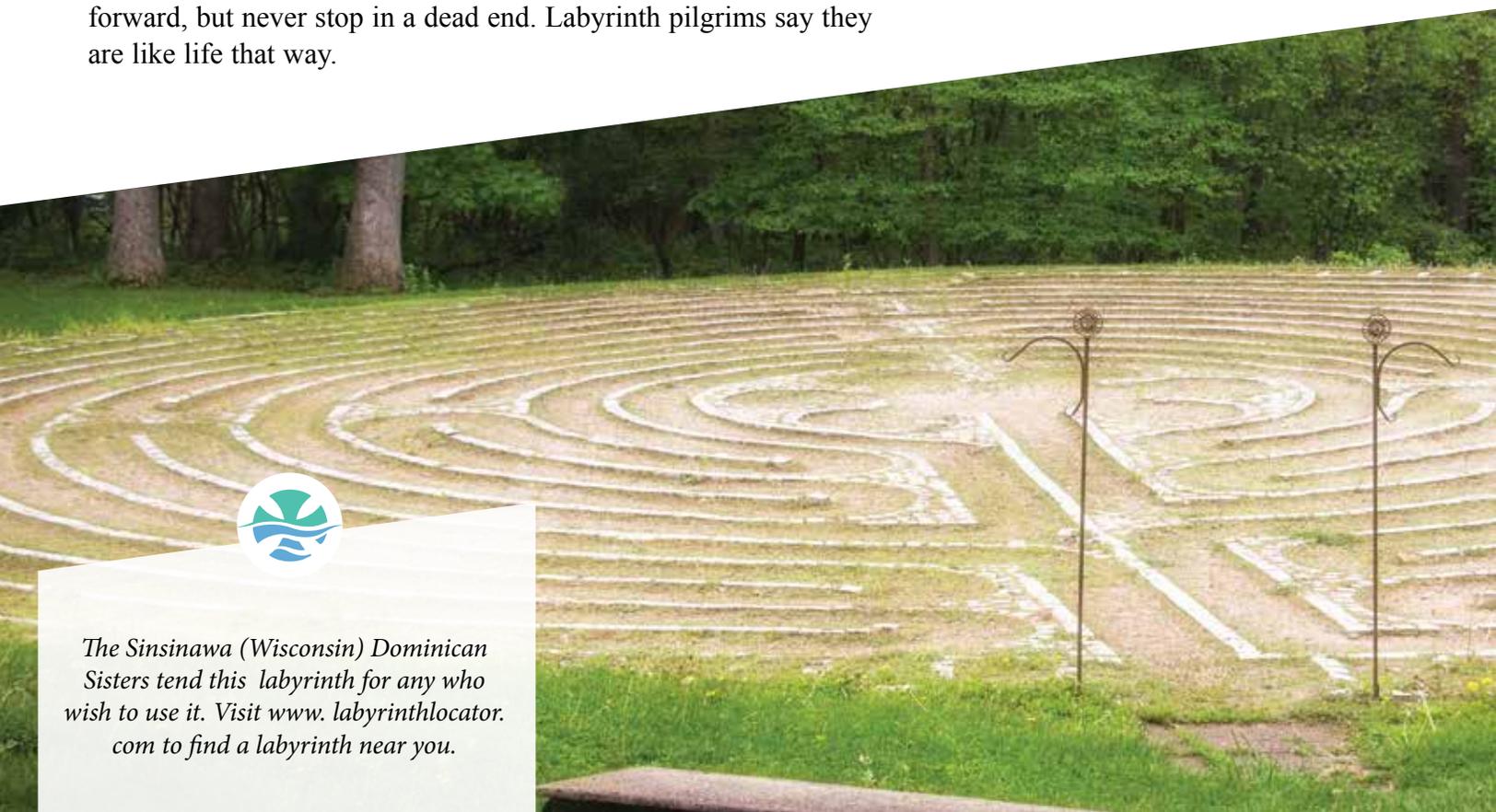
Let the sky, the drifting clouds, the open vistas envelop you and draw you up to another realm.

~ Sister Catherine Cleary

“The many turns in the path are life’s curves,” Sr. Marianne says. “Sometimes you’re in the sun, sometimes in the shade, some events are unexpected, some are not. ▶



*The Sinsinawa (Wisconsin) Dominican Sisters tend this labyrinth for any who wish to use it. Visit [www.labyrinthlocator.com](http://www.labyrinthlocator.com) to find a labyrinth near you.*





*Sisters Anne Newcomer and Margaret Suerth (now deceased) visit the Sisters' cemetery in Nauvoo, IL.*

“Walking a labyrinth is prayer in motion. It takes you through a complicated winding road, slowly, meditatively. It opens your mind and senses slowly.”

### Visit a cemetery.

Whether visiting your own deceased relatives or simply strolling down quiet, meandering paths, a walk or drive in a cemetery is a perfect place to ponder where you've been ... and where you're going.

“If you don't know anyone, your experience might include thinking about the stories behind the graves you see,” Sister Sheila McGrath says. “The dates and names can lead to reflection. You glimpse the human condition. You wonder as you wander.”

You may also find yourself thinking about what's really important in life, even asking whether you should hold onto an old grudge or hurt.

“Walking through a cemetery can be a great pilgrimage in forgiveness,” Sr. Sheila says. “It certainly reminds you of where all life leads. The big picture.”

Cemeteries evoke such powerful emotions that it's natural to experience a sense of the sacred there.

“Standing in a cemetery is a spiritual experience for me,” Sister Susan Hutchens says. “They are fascinating places.”

### Tend your garden.

Gardening may strike you as too ordinary a task for pilgrimage, but let Sister Mary Schmidt convince you otherwise. She says the tasks – planning, planting, weeding and harvesting – together create a journey rich in spiritual nourishment.

“Gardening is a spiritual journey for me,” she says of her annual focus.

Why? From intention to travel guide, she says a season in the garden can fulfill the goals of pilgrimage.

“I think and pray about it,” she says. “I plan about it. You must plan so the garden comes up and plants thrive. Some don't like each other, so they cannot be planted next to each other. Also, remember that certain plants take over. Squash and cucumbers will take over if you're not careful.”

Planning gives way to planting and growing, steps that invite reflection along the way.

“I say, God, here are my hands. I pray as I plant each seed, that it will take root and come up and be happy,” Sr. Mary says. “Then I fertilize and water, remembering too much of anything is not good. It's not good for us, either.”

When unexpected things happen – as they do on any pilgrimage – you learn to accept them. ▶



“Surprises happen,” she says. “Last year the garden flooded out. I lost all the beans and beets, along with some sunflowers. I replanted, but the beans failed. That’s life.”

Less damaging garden surprises include the sprouting of “volunteers” like tomatoes and chrysanthemums. While many would pull them out, Sr. Mary has a different perspective.

“I leave volunteers where they are,” she laughs. “I figure they’ve made it this far on their own, why not? Sometimes they provide the best color and best flavor.”

Sr. Mary shares two of her favorite lessons from her annual pilgrimage. “The beauty of any pilgrimage is, at the end, you can collect all the fruits and share,” she says. The other? “God is near.”

## Go to the Holy Land.

If you’ve always wanted to see the Holy Land, Sister Mary Core has a travel tip. “Look under your feet. You’re standing on it.”

In other words, wherever you are and whatever you do, you’re on sacred ground. To call it pilgrimage, though, you need awareness. Sr. Mary offers a recent example from her own life. It took place when she and other community members drove to Chicago to explore the Jane Addams House and Mother Cabrini Shrine.

“I realized it had become a pilgrimage while I was there,” she says. “These women were for the people, which I found very meaningful. At one point, I went into the garden chapel at Mother Cabrini’s shrine, and took a moment to just be. It moved me deeply.”

Back in the car, Sr. Mary and the others continued their pilgrimage by reflecting on the experience. They did something else that is

common to pilgrimage: they changed plans. Instead of hurrying home for supper, they stopped along the way for more leisurely conversation over a meal. “This one day felt like a long vacation afterwards, because it was so renewing,” Sr. Mary remembers.

Renewal is a wonderful goal, she continues. “Pilgrimage isn’t always about spiritual awakening, although spiritual awakenings happen more easily when we’re refreshed.” ■

## What to read, watch

*Jesus, A Pilgrimage*, by Fr. James Martin

*Pilgrim in Time*, by Rosanne Keller

*The Pilgrim’s Way*, by an anonymous Russian pilgrim

*Walk in a Relaxed Manner*, by Joyce Rupp

*The Way*, a film by Emilio Estevez and Martin Sheen

# Wisdom from the Camino



*Benedictine Oblate Madeleine Callahan is an Oblate of the Benedictine Sisters of St. Mary Monastery. She walked part of the Camino in 2001, carrying blessings from the Benedictine Sisters, who also signed her t-shirt (below). Here she shares insights and suggestions for your own trek.*

## **What did you learn or discover along the trail?**

I discovered the rhythm of being on a pilgrimage. Daytime was a time of solitude and very little talking, be that with my daughter who was my partner or with others on the road. Evenings, however, were social: everyone was talking about their fatigue, their feet, why they were walking, their deep thoughts or experiences while walking. We ate together and often slept in big dorm-like shelters.

## **What surprised you?**

Many things, but one unanticipated event was getting lost in a forest. We spent a very long afternoon wandering all around that wide, rocky mountain. You never forget the feeling of being lost and scared. I have often thought with great sympathy of refugees walking unmarked roads and how much trust they have to muster up.

## **What do you cherish about it today?**

There is a very old tradition on the Camino to hold a rock while walking. Along the road there are scattered mounds of rocks deposited by pilgrims over the last millennium. I held a number of rocks and deposited my own prayers on some of those mounds.

Last year I found a rock with a lovely fossil in it between Benet House Retreat Center and the monastery, and took a long walk with it.

This practice of walking while literally holding prayers in your hands taught me a bodily way of living my faith, and of identifying with Jesus and his disciples who walked from place to place.

## **Do you have any advice for how to create a backyard pilgrimage?**

Holding a rock or a flower for a long while, silly as that may sound, may help you concentrate on returning to your prayer.

If you can find a day of solitude, take it. But remember, if this is to be a pilgrimage, you also need social time (if possible).

Structure your day with “stops” to be aware of your progress. In the morning, examine how much hope you have for reaching your evening rest. At noon, rejoice over your perseverance, and trust you will arrive. In the evening, relax and talk to loved ones instead of watching TV or listening to the news.

*Visit [smmsisters.org](http://smmsisters.org) to learn about the Oblate program!*

A close-up photograph of a white t-shirt with green text and a peace symbol. The text reads: "PÈLERINAGE" in a large, stylized font, followed by "POUR LA" in a smaller font. Below that, it says "Sr. Rosemary" on the left, a peace symbol in the center, and "Sr. Norberta" on the right.

PÈLERINAGE  
POUR LA  
Sr. Rosemary ☺ Sr. Norberta

# Living, Moving, Being in God

*By Sister Audrey Cleary, OSB*

An ancient tale has the disciple asking the teacher, “Holy One, is there anything I can do to make myself enlightened?”

The teacher answers, “As little as you can do to make the sun rise in the morning.”

“Then, of what use,” the surprised disciple asks, “are the spiritual exercises you prescribe?”

“To make sure,” the teacher replies, “that you are awake when the sun begins to rise!”

Each of us has received the invitation and challenge to “be awake” when the sun rises.

Centering Prayer prepares us to accept this gift.

The experience of interior silence during the time of Centering Prayer opens us to a deeper spiritual level of being.

The awareness cultivated in prayer gradually leads to a greater sensitivity to God’s presence everywhere at all times.

The discipline of letting go of all else and being receptive to the Divine Presence and activity in prayer eventually enables us to say with Paul, “In God we live and move and have our being!”

*Sister Audrey Cleary, 1940 - 2018, published this reflection in the October 1995 issue of “Speaking of Silence,” a publication of Illinois Contemplative Outreach.*

## How to Pray Centering Prayer

To experience Centering Prayer, choose a quiet place and time of day.

Sit comfortably, back straight. Begin by saying a short prayer first, to prepare yourself for this sacred time.

Close your eyes and take up a sacred word – choose a one- or two-syllable word like Peace, or God – to signal your intention to withdraw from the everyday world and go into the deepest part of yourself.

Thoughts will surface, but when they do, gently take up your word again and return to interior silence. Begin with 20 minutes at a time.

CENTERING PRAYER IS A WAY OF  
**BEING WITH GOD  
WITHOUT WORDS...  
TO MAKE SPACE FOR  
GOD WITHIN YOU.**

SISTER AUDREY CLEARY





*Sisters Mary Core (left) and Susan Hutchens joined other Benedictine Sisters to help host the Listen UP open house with the Sisters of Humility (Davenport) and the Sisters of St. Francis (Clinton).*

## Community News

- Listen UP, created to commemorate National Catholic Sisters Week 2019, included three videos showing listening as an act of peace. The campaign was created in collaboration with the Catholic Sisters of the Upper Mississippi River Valley and Azubuike African American Council for the Arts. It was written, directed and produced using local teenage actors in local venues. The videos can be accessed at [smmsisters.org](http://smmsisters.org).

- Sister Sandra Brunenn attended the annual meeting of American Benedictine Prioresses held at Sacred Heart Monastery, Cullman, AL, Feb. 20-27, 2019. Part of the meeting was shared with the American Benedictine Abbots. A highlight was a co-Sister Susan Hutchens and Abbot Primate Gregory Polan entitled “Waiting with Joyful Hope.”

- Benedictine Oblate Feli Sebastian has been named a 2018 APA Citizen Psychologist by the American Psychological Association for her sustained community engagement and leadership working with underserved women and minorities. Learn more at [smmsisters.org](http://smmsisters.org).

### Serving the Greater Community:

Many wonderful nonprofits serve those who need help here in the Quad-Cities area. The Benedictine Sisters can be found helping in several, from preparing and serving a regular evening meal to volunteering weekly in a food pantry. Sisters also serve on the boards of the following organizations:

- Sister Mary Schmidt, Quad-Cities Interfaith
- Sister Marlene Miller, Churches United
- Sisters Mary Core and Marianne Burkhard, Sanctuary Coalition
- Sister Stefanie MacDonald, Special People Encounter Christ
- Sister Bobbi Bussan, Project Now
- Sister Claudia Scharf, Rock Island Audubon Society

### Spring/Summer at Benet House Retreat Center:

Visit [smmsisters.org/retreats](http://smmsisters.org/retreats) to see our entire list of monthly programs and longer weekend retreats.

The Wonder of it All – Make time for yourself with this guided retreat, May 7-10.

Women’s Weekend Retreat – Engage with women of Scripture, everyday life and your own experience, June 21-23.

Men’s Weekend Retreat – Explore what it means to live as “God’s beloved son,” June 28-30.



## This Sister Rocks the Town!

“It felt like a message from my dead mother.”

The young woman who wrote that is not alone. She – like thousands of others posting on Facebook pages dedicated to the topic – had found a “Kindness Rock” somewhere, and its hopeful message had been just what she needed to hear.

The Kindness Rocks movement – and it has turned into one, if its social media presence is any indication – began on Cape Cod several years ago, and has spread around the globe. It consists of painting small stones with inspiring messages and/or pictures, then hiding them where others can find them and re-share.

Last fall, the activity spread to St. Mary Monastery when Sister Sheila McGrath began “rocking” the Quad-City area. Calling her contributions “Monastery Rocks,” Sr. Sheila says she has painted several dozen so far. She has hidden them at Trinity Hospital, restaurants, gas stations, retail outlets and even parties to which she has been invited.

“I usually keep one in each of the pockets of my coats so I can share them wherever I go,” she says. “When I hide them – I always make sure no one sees me – I pray it makes a difference in someone’s life.”

Although most people posting on Facebook say they intend to re-hide stones they have found, Sister Sheila says her feeling is a bit different. “I write ‘Keep or Rehide’ on the back of the stones,” she says. “If someone wants to keep one, they should do that.”



*This Monastery Rock was found by someone who posted this picture on the Facebook page, QC Rocks. Sister Sheila had hidden it sometime over the past six months, after the above photo was taken!*

SEE, I AM DOING A NEW THING.  
NOW IT SPRINGS UP;  
DO YOU NOT PERCEIVE IT?

ISAIAH 43:19



## Sister Audrey Cleary, OSB 1940-2018

Sister Audrey Cleary, 78, died Monday, December 31, 2018 at the Monastery.

Born Jan. 2, 1940 in Bloomington, IL, Sr. Audrey entered the Benedictine community February 2, 1959 and made her final profession July 11, 1965. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Marycrest College, Master of Arts from Marquette University, and Master of Arts in Spirituality from St Mary's University, Toronto. Her ministries included teaching, serving in religious education and parish and House of Prayer ministry, and in the contemplative prayer movement.



## Sister Rosemary Becker, OSB 1929-2019

Sister Rosemary Becker, 89, died Saturday, March 2, 2019 at the Monastery.

Born Nov. 6, 1929 in Maytown, Illinois, Sr. Rosemary entered the Benedictine community on Oct. 3, 1948 and made her final profession July 11, 1952. She graduated from St. Ambrose College, Davenport, IA. Sr. Rosemary's chief areas of ministry included education and community service.

## Reunion Announcements

**Class of 1975 | Oct. 4-6, 2019**

### Attention Alums:

Reserve your space at Benet House as early as possible to improve your chance of securing space for your next reunion. We fill up years in advance!

## In Memoriam ...

Mother of **Katherine Klein Forney**, '75 died Jan. 2019

**Mary Lynn Hojacki**, '47 died Dec. 3, 2018

John Kraft, husband of **Peggy Reidner**, '66 died.

**Marcella Ketcham**, '53 died Jan. 9, 2019.

Bill Smith, husband of **Elaine Bart**, '54 died Dec. 1, 2018.



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# Connecting Point

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