

Walking into the Wilderness: A Retreat for You, Now

Retreats are a time of stepping back, of reflecting. They are often silent. They are certainly restful.

If you've never made a retreat before, you can enjoy one here, now. Look out your window. Hear the birds, the cicadas. Notice the sky, troubled by clouds or endlessly blue. Take a deep breath. You are journeying with the Benedictine Sisters during their silent, annual, weeklong summer retreat. Our director is Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB, Subiaco Monastery, Ark.

Profound quiet fills our hallways and rooms. Many smiles and pats on the shoulder replace conversation. A sense of relaxation is palpable.

We gather in the dining room after Lauds for our first conference with our Abbot Jerome. After his 40-minute presentation, we remain in silence. We stroll the grounds. We journal and sketch. We read and reflect.

After Mass at 11:30, we have lunch, rest, and enjoy the second conference of the day. Vespers is at 5:00 p.m., followed by our silent



dinner. Unlike any other evening of the year, TVs remain off, games unplayed. Instead, we reflect in silence on the theme of the retreat.

Abbot Jerome has chosen to explore wilderness with us. His conferences are thought provoking and inspiring. They give us many jumping-off places for our own silent reflection.

Wilderness: Where our spiritual life takes place

Dating back to Exodus, the biblical role of journeying through

wilderness begins with Moses as he is sent into uncharted territory by God.

The date and place may be different for us, but the call is the same. We are sent into life with no roadmap, no visible guide. We must navigate this wilderness listening with the ear of our heart, with God as our guide.

Practicing avoidance of the journey

Moses himself tried to avoid the job assignment. He adopted

Continued next page

LETTER from the Prioress



*Sr. Sandra Brunenn,
OSB*

Connecting with You

Here at St. Mary Monastery we have been thinking about the ways we connect with you, our friends.

For one thing, we are delighted to share that we have redesigned our website. One of the new features will be the introduction of online registration for retreats at Benet House Retreat Center. Check us out at www.smmsisters.org!



We are also introducing a way for people to share our life and charism more intensely. If you have the interest in an experience of Benedictine living - and have the freedom to do so - you might want to consider our live-in volunteer program. Volunteers share our life and ministry for a period of two weeks to one year. We provide an environment for spiritual renewal and growth along with opportunities for service. For more information, contact us at (309) 283-2105 or benedictines@smmsisters.org.

Finally, you might simply make a mini-retreat right now as this issue of Connecting Point suggests. Whatever works for you, may these summer days inspire you to connect more deeply with your loved ones and with our God, the source of all life.

Blessings,

Sister Sandra

Retreat cont'd. from page 1



several common arguments to try to persuade God to send someone – anyone – else. Sound familiar?

Denial is one of our favorite strategies. It's not really happening to me. I don't have to do it. So-and-so is much better at this than I am!

As our parents pointed out when we were in grade school, such responses are so much nonsense. We must accept our responsibilities; we are as capable as anyone else.

Another common strategy is escape. That's where we so immerse ourselves in addictions such as substances, gambling and the pursuit of personal power or wealth that we forget – or bury – our call.

Continued next page

Retreat (cont'd. from page 2)

Control is another way out. We amass great wealth, power and goods in an effort to maintain control over our lives. We think we can go it alone, because we have all we need to be successful. We don't need God ... and we're not in the wilderness!

No matter how we try to avoid the journey, our efforts fail. We are called to face reality. To keep ourselves healthy. To depend upon one another. To relinquish the illusion of control. And to listen with the ear of our hearts.

Embracing a journey we don't want

God's call is hard to successfully resist. Look at Moses! Yet we can accept the call without embracing it. We can approach it with bitterness or halfheartedness. Whatever our call – and we are called to many things daily – we can get mired in the brambles of the wilderness when we don't give our whole selves to the journey.

Indeed, we get stuck when we try only halfheartedly to forgive someone. We get stuck when we can only offer a bitter welcome. We get stuck when we pray without intent.

So, how do we embrace a journey or call we don't want? How do we embrace losing a job, for instance? How do we embrace chronic pain or losing a loved one?



Trusting the Guide

Our guide, of course, is God. And if we're going to successfully navigate our uncharted path, we must trust God's loving guidance. How?

By establishing and maintaining a personal relationship with God through prayer, we discover the tools we need for the journey. Those tools - beauty, insights, wisdom and joy – provide the light we need to find our way.

And, finally, how do we know we are praying well enough? If we are intending to pray, we are praying well enough! That is, prayer is showing up.

It's intending. It's wanting. God does the rest.

Called to go ... and become

Despite Moses' efforts to avoid the journey, God had chosen Moses. Moses had to say *Yes* to become the person God intended him to be. As do we.

Like Moses, God calls us to a path of becoming that is discernable only by the light of God. Like Moses, we must place our trust in God. And when we do, God will guide us home.

Our retreat ended weeks ago, but the lessons continue to nourish and sustain us. Consider making your own retreat. We offer a range of retreats and programs all year long. Visit smmsisters.org for a list of upcoming retreats and programs. Or contact Sister Jackie Walsh at (309) 283-2108 to receive a brochure in the mail. Our retreats are ecumenical. We welcome all ... and look forward to journeying with you!

A Benedictine Adventure in the Woods



When Sister Mary Core’s youth group began hatching a plan to stay overnight at Camp Loud Thunder along the Mississippi River in Illinois, they knew who to call for help. Sister Stefanie MacDonald loved to camp; she had taken her nephews every chance she got. But now that her nephews were grown – and her own students were just preschoolers – Sr. Stefanie missed cooking and sleeping outdoors.

So when Sr. Mary asked her to help out, Sr. Stefanie said yes. Together with 9 youth group members – and a few parents and siblings – they created a delicious, fun, Benedictine and memorable experience.

Eat, Pray ... Laugh!

The day began with a caravan to the park, about half an hour down river from the monastery. After tent set-up, a hike, a few games and supper, everyone gathered around the fire for Mass with Father Jim DeBisschop.

“To have Mass with such an intimate group out in the woods was very special,” Sr. Mary says. “Being together after the sun goes down – praying, sharing, being present to each other – shows the kids how to step back from the busyness and noise of our life. Listening to the crickets and other night sounds is just phenomenal.”

Even the shrieks and laughter during a vigorous game of Hide and Spook didn’t break the peace. “In the big picture, maybe taking kids camping isn’t critical,” Sr. Stefanie says. “But spending time in nature helps them see that the important things in life are really very simple.”



Sunday Prayer Walk

After a quiet night – the kids were too worn out to talk much after getting into their tents – morning dawned with a fresh beauty often missed in the bustle of daily life. “We are called to beauty,” Sr. Mary says. “We all need to spend time out of our busy lives to relax and soak it up.”

After a hot breakfast around the fire, the group walked in prayerful silence down to the lake. “Silence allowed the kids to be fully present to the experience of walking in nature, of reflecting on the weekend,” Sr. Mary says. “It allowed them to use all their senses – not just their mouths – to take in all that is gift from God. Silence is a Benedictine practice. The kids got a taste of what we’re all about.”

Afterwards, they gathered at a picnic table to share about the walk itself, and the weekend in general. “It was a good way to end the weekend,” Sr. Stefanie says. “It was nourishing in so many ways.”



Whatever you did for the least of these ... you did for me

The 60s were a time of great social justice activism across the country, and the monastery was no different. Sisters took part in Civil Rights marches and helped establish homeless shelters. They volunteered in social welfare agencies. One such agency, Project NOW, today serves 38,000 people in three Illinois counties. Our own Sister Margaret Murphy, OSB, was one of the founding members.

Angie* had lost her job and was five days away from losing her apartment. She and her three kids were soon to be out on the street, hungry, cold and scared. She sat across from the Project NOW outreach worker and held her breath. She had nowhere else to turn.

Angie needn't have worried. Created in 1968 by a team of dedicated community activists – including Sister Margaret Murphy, OSB – Project NOW'S goal is to help people like Angie by providing temporary solutions, education and encouragement.

“We enrolled Angie into our ongoing Emergency Solutions Grant program and began paying her rent while she looked for a job,” Project NOW supervisor Marianne Moore says. “We helped her with food stamps, budgeting, life skills and childcare.” Within six weeks, Angie had found a new job and is on her feet again.

The early days

Project NOW was the brainchild of a group of Catholic Church parishioners and administrators who

wanted to ‘walk the talk’ of Vatican II’s reemphasis on Catholic social teaching. Its purpose was to address the increasing poverty, alienation and basic lack of services in Rock Island’s poorest neighborhoods. Today, it serves 38,000 people in three counties.



Sr. Margaret Murphy, OSB

“We believe communities are strengthened by helping people help themselves,” Moore says. “We provide temporary assistance while they get back on their feet.”

Still committed to social justice

The Benedictine Sisters continue to financially support the organization Sr. Margaret helped create.

For her part, Sr. Margaret is quick to point out that other people – including her own now-deceased brother, Fr. Thomas Murphy – were instrumental in its creation. “Everyone pitched in to help,” she says. “We were all committed to the goal of social justice.”

Director Maureen Hart says the upshot of that activist period was getting structures and systems like Project NOW in place.

“The 60s activists are responsible for today’s successes,” Hart says. “Thanks to people like Sister Margaret and her Benedictine Sisters, those who are in need are receiving a leg up.”

**Not her real name.*

How holy are you ... and does it matter?

Everyone is called to holiness. Second Vatican Council Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, Lumen Gentium Chapter 5

Mother Teresa once said, “Holiness does not consist in doing extraordinary things. It consists in accepting, with a smile, what Jesus sends us.”

Therese de Lisieux said, “Holiness consists simply in doing God’s will, and being just what God wants us to be.”

We often characterize holiness as belonging to someone else, someone who serves meals to the homeless, tutors at-risk kids after school and can be counted on to volunteer for every parish need all at the same time. But what, really, does it mean to be holy? Are we all called to it? How do we achieve it? Isn’t it good enough to just be ... good?

These questions were posed to a few Benedictine Sisters and associates recently.



Sr. Marilyn Ring, OSB

Sr. Marilyn Ring, OSB

When I hear the word, holy, I think of Joseph Goldbrunner’s book, *Holiness is Wholeness*. We become whole when we use the gifts we’ve been given. And we must be whole to be holy.

That is, holiness isn’t so much about what we do – say prayers, make the sign of the cross, kneel – as who we are when we do them.

As a young novice, I would look at the elders spending a long time in the chapel, rosaries rattling, and think, That’s what it takes to become holy.

Later, I began to realize that those things – sitting in front of the Blessed Sacrament or saying prayers or being on time when the bell rang – certainly were helpful in making me aware of my need to be in communication with God. But I realized also that I couldn’t grow in relationship with God unless I could see God in others.

God’s gifts to all of us – kindness, listening, seeking and being nourished by beauty –

must be accepted and shared if we are to be whole. Whole persons are able to see others’ needs and try to ease the pain of those needs. That’s holiness.



Sr. Sheila McGrath, OSB

There is a difference between being a good person and being a holy person. If I’m on a board because I want my name on the letterhead, or if I volunteer because I want to rub elbows with the other volunteers, that might make me a good person. To be a holy person, I have to want to do it simply because it’s the right thing to do.



Sr. Sheila McGrath, OSB

Holiness isn't just praying. Liturgy of the Hours, Eucharist, Centering Prayer are important. But how I live out my prayer is important, too. It's how we write our own Gospel.

How do we interpret and live out our prayer?



Rosemary Schmitt

Rosemary Schmitt, Welcome Desk Volunteer for the Benedictine Sisters

Holiness is achieving the potential we were created for. It's using our gifts and talents to serve others.

A priest giving a homily once said, Holiness can come from making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for your family.

That puts it in perspective.

Dorothy Day said, Don't call me a saint. She didn't care about looks. She wanted to do the work that mattered to her.

She had it right. It's not about appearances. If my own holiness comes about as I sit here welcoming guests to the monastery, so be it.



Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB

Sr. Marlene Miller, OSB

Balance is important to holiness. All our lives we strive for balance at work, at home. If we are balanced, we are whole. If we are whole, there's no excuse not to be holy.

Achieving balance requires a lot of little things. It requires getting enough sleep, eating nutritionally, exercising, being in nature. If we are out of balance, we suffer. We focus on our own pain, to the extent that we can't put others first.

When we are in balance, we can use our free will for good. We can be holy.



Linda Jani, Benedictine Oblate

Being holy means living in such a way that we become who God intends us to be. It means listening in prayer to God's voice and seeking awareness of God's presence in even life's most difficult circumstances.

Holiness is dynamic, requiring daily participation in the creation of our own little part of God's great Creation.

The Fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – grow in our lives as we seek holiness.

Sr. Mary Jane Wallace, OSB

When I was growing up, holiness was something up there, and apart from us. It just belonged to the saints and priests and nuns. Holiness was perfection.

But holiness is not perfection. It's staying close to God. It's following the commandments and Jesus' message. We are to take care of each other.



Sr. Mary Jane Wallace, OSB

Continued back cover

Sisters share ministry stories with students

Sister Rosemary wanted to help children whose parents had died. So in 1955, she went to work at the St. Vincent Home for Orphans in Davenport. There, she helped care for the babies still in cribs. She dressed and played with the toddlers. She taught the older children in a classroom at the orphanage.

It was hard for the children to be without their parents. But the Catholic Sisters were kind and loving and took very good care of their young charges. And the orphanage had wonderful things to offer the children.

There was a chicken coop out back with chickens that laid eggs for the children's breakfast. There were kittens to play with. There were fields to run through. And of course, there were lots of other kids to play with.

One day, a police officer knocked at the front door. He had an 6-year-old boy with him. Sister Rosemary knew that meant the child needed a home. "Hello, Sister," the police officer said. "Do you have room for another child?" ...



Students from Our Lady of Grace Academy, East Moline, Ill. ask questions of Sisters Rosemary Becker, Mary Core and Mary Jane Wallace during a National Catholic Sisters Week event.

Sr. Rosemary Becker, OSB was one of several Benedictines who participated in an all-school curriculum about Catholic Sisters during the inaugural National Catholic Sisters Week last spring. Held at Our Lady of Grace Academy, East Moline, Ill., the Benedictine Sisters shared ministry stories with students, and - for the third and fourth grade classes - provided a chance to ask them about their ministries.

Grace teacher Sister Stefanie MacDonald, OSB spearheaded the initiative there to help students get to know Sisters.

"It was very well received," she says.

"The children loved the stories. They had many questions for the Sisters. I couldn't be happier."

Current plans call for a more extensive program in 2015, pending some editing and tweaking.

"I'd like to share the curriculum with other Catholic schools," Sr. Stefanie says. "We're working toward that goal!"

Sr. Phyllis McMurray Scholarship given to freshman

The scholarship initiated by SMA alumnae following Sr. Phyllis McMurray's death last year was given to Alleman High School freshman Olivia Best. Olivia says "it will be a tremendous help as I continue my Catholic education."

The scholarship is a fitting tribute to Sr. Phyllis, a grateful recipient of Catholic education herself. She served as principal of St. Mary's Academy in Nauvoo, Ill. from 1975 until its closing in 1997.



Jubilarians celebrate monastic life

Benedictine Sisters (from left) Mary Jean Feeney (75 years), Helen Carey (60 years), Denise Vrombaut (60 years), Rachel Bergschneider (50 years, below left), and Judith Ann Croegaert (50 years, below right) celebrated their jubilees in 2014.



When asked to reflect on their monastic lives, they replied:

Sr. Mary Jean: My vocation has been sustained by community life and nourished by daily Eucharist. I've been very happy.

Sr. Helen: I am grateful for the blessings of this monastic life, its continual challenges and opportunities. The shared prayers are powerfully graced.



Sr. Denise: The Benedictine Sisters helped teach me patience and the importance of hospitality. I'm very grateful to be celebrating a lifetime of caring with them.

Sr. Rachel: I love the whole experience of helping people seek and uncover God in their lives. That's the passion behind being a Benedictine Sister and ministering as a pastoral associate for me.



Sr. Judith Ann: My vocation has provided me with many opportunities to grow in my spiritual journey and has blessed me with wonderful people who have loved and supported me. It's been a blessing.

Make Plans for your Autumn Retreat



Discernment Weekend for 22-50 year old Single Catholic Women

Have you ever wondered what makes an apostolic community different from a monastic community? Come learn about the range of different Catholic Sisters' communities located along the Mississippi River in Iowa and Illinois. Learn about their prayer life and lifestyles. Learn about their ministries and where they live. Presenter: Sr. Stefanie MacDonald, OSB. Fri. Aug. 29 - Mon. Sept. 1 Contact (309) 283-2300 or smacdonald@smmsisters.org

The Joy of the Gospel

Join us for this exciting opportunity to study and reflect on the document *EVANGELII GAUDIUM* written by Pope Francis. Presenter: Sr. Marilyn Ring, OSB. Sat. Sept. 6, 9am-12 pm.

Women's Interfaith Conversation

Formerly called Jewish, Christian, Muslim Women's Dialogue, faith-filled women are invited to come share their beliefs. This two-part program will be held at St. John's Lutheran Church, 4501 - 7th Ave, Rock Island; Mondays, Sept. 15 & Sept. 22, 7-8:30 pm. Contact (309) 283-2118 or ccleary@smmsisters.org

24-Hour Body, Mind, Spirit Retreat for Women

Explore how to travel your spiritual journey, what to put in your "backpack," how to read the "maps," and what to do with those pesky little trolls under the bridge! Presenter: Helen Schiltz, certified spiritual director. Fri. Sept. 26, 7 pm-Sat. Sept. 27, 7 pm.

For information and fees regarding these programs, or for a complete listing of fall retreats, contact Sr. Jackie Walsh, OSB at (309) 283-2108 or retreats@smmsisters.org.



SMA News

1948 Joan Cook has published her memoirs. “Cookie” details her time as Sister Raymond Cook in the Benedictine community, as well as her experiences as teacher and principal at SMA. To learn more, visit Bookcrafters.net or call (720) 851-0397.

1953 Mary Ann Cahill Weakley will publish “Monastery to Matrimony” in late July. The memoir covers her 20 years in the convent and years at SMA. It will be available from www.balboapress.com and other sellers. A portion of the proceeds will go to COPE Ministry, a school in Pokot, Kenya, founded and directed by Barbara Britton O’Donohue ’60.

1967 Char Wiest Tieglund posted the following on the SMA Facebook page (edited here for length): When I came to St. Mary’s the Sisters were in full habit (that changed to a modified habit before I left) and used the name they took when they made their vows, eg., Sr. Marilyn was Sr. Stephen and Sr. Kathleen was Sr. Ambrose.

There were 60 girls in my freshman class and 56 graduated. We did not have lay teachers. The Sisters supervised the dorms and were called “prefects.” As a freshman there were two dorm buildings: The old Academy building and Mary Hall and each building had several “rooms”; some as large as 18 girls per room, several were 8 girl rooms and there was one with two students. The other dorms were Joseph Hall (sophomores) Benet Hall (juniors) and

the Villa (Seniors). As a senior there were 8 of us who lived in the very top of the Academy behind the stage and the OLD gym. Sr. Ruth was our prefect.

Day to day life was pretty simple with the focus on our school work and our faith. We had a study hall every night from 6:40 pm - 8:30 pm, and one on Sunday afternoon. Lights out at 10 pm. I don’t remember the time that cursed bell rang in the morning but I do remember jumping out of bed so my sheets weren’t thrown on the floor! Mass was probably around 7 am and classes started at 9 a.m Plenty of time to get your board job done, iron clothes, play basketball, do club work, etc.

The only times I remember watching TV was during the State of the Union address (we got out of study hall for it) and the Iowa Girls Basketball championship game. School was let out the day of the funeral of President John F. Kennedy and we watched the proceedings on our small TV.

There were a couple dances a year but Freshmen did not attend. The Seniors put on amazing musical productions. My mother and two sisters came to see the Wizard of Oz and were shocked at how well it was done.

We could go downtown for one hour during the week and one hour on Saturday. You could smile at the boys downtown but not talk to them. Saturday nights (when I had 50 cents & the movie was an acceptable rating) we could go to the movie at the Nauvoo theater. We were accompanied by a couple

of the Sisters and walked together in a long line.

The socially conscious Sisters allowed us to attend NCAA meetings in Ft. Madison and we had a march down the streets of Nauvoo. In the early '60s, public school high school females wore dresses to school. There were occasions when it was acceptable to wear pants. At St. Mary's we wore cocoa brown jumpers with gold-colored blouses. We wore a round gold lace veil to Mass during the week. On Sunday we wore Navy jumpers and white blouses and a sheer navy veil to Mass. During our free time we wore dresses or skirts. The only time we wore pants was to our picnic supper at the park which moved to the cafeteria when it was too cold.

All of our laundry was done by the Sisters in the basement of Joseph Hall one day a week. The uniform blouses had removeable buttons for ease of ironing. The Sisters also ironed our uniform blouses. I remember seeing the postulants and novices (white veils) working away. Since most of my clothes required ironing, I can appreciate how hard they worked.

Since this reflection was prompted by reflections of Sr. Phyllis (a Postulant when I started school), I must share that the most beautiful music I've ever heard was the Sisters singing a High Requiem Mass. I always loved to go to Compline at night to listen to them chant. From time to time I will sing one of the songs that we sang with them.

Lest the Sisters think I wasn't paying attention (and they could since I gave every indication I wasn't), I need to say how much becoming a strong, independent female who believes in being my neighbor's keeper, education and faithful practices comes from their influence. I always laugh when people suggest going to a Catholic girls' boarding school was limiting - Not So, I respond! I lived with young women from all over the state and some from out-of-state or Mexico with completely different backgrounds and experiences! For me, it was life changing.

In Memoriam ...

Catherine Ann Laroe, SMA '55, sister of Margaret Lucy Laroe '53, died July 4, 2014

Bob Logsdon, husband of Susan Van Hootegen, '60

Judy Lipuma Petrasek, '77 died June 7, 2014 of a heart attack

Ray Spaeth, husband of Irma Cook Spaeth, '50 died June 13, 2014

Kent Watson, husband of Carol Logsdon, '73 died in April 2014

Maureen Arnold Stump, '46 died April 12, 2014

Martha Cook Lee, '43 sister of Joan Cook, '48 and Irma Cook Spaeth, '50 died April 9, 2014

Rosemary Brown Buchanan, '52 died in 2013

Father of Michelle Johnson, '69, Molly Manatt '71 and Julie Manatt '73 died

Reunion Announcements

Class of 1964

August 15-17, 2014

Class of 1962

September 19-21, 2014

Class of 1954

October 10-12, 2014

Connecting
Point

Summer 2014

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Holiness (cont'd. from page 7)



We are saints in the making. We are called to be holy, called to be like the Lord. We are children of God, heirs of heaven, because God chose – and chooses – us.

Holiness is us, now. It's our choice whether to keep it.

Finally ...

We've been called to holiness since Moses' encounter with the burning bush. "Moses learns that holiness is made of virtues, not of visions; that holiness depends on being for the other; that holiness depends on being about something greater than the self, and; that holiness is being present to the Presence, everywhere it is and even where it seems it isn't." (Joan Chittister, OSB, Tikkun Magazine (Sept./Oct. 2006))

In other words, holiness is never about someone else. It's about us, making our way through the beauty and despair that is life. It's about looking for ways to help one another. It's about being with God in all and for all. And yes, it's worth seeking.

To explore these and other spiritual questions in your own life, look for a certified spiritual director in your area. Trained to help others see where God is calling them, a spiritual director can be a great resource! For more information about spiritual direction offered at St. Mary Monastery, contact Sr. Jackie Walsh, OSB at retreats@smmsisters.org or (309) 283-2108.