

Benedictine Bridge

connecting with the communities at Holy Wisdom Monastery
weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and care for the earth into a shared way of life

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January 2017



Visit Holy Wisdom Monastery in the winter and discover how the peaceful setting can help renew your spirit.

Sunday Assembly

What binds us as a community?

by Tom Zanzig, Sunday Assembly member



*Pamela Johnson (right) and Tom Zanzig (center) lead the *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* series. Both are oblates and Sunday Assembly members. Here they answer questions during a break.*

What binds us together as a community of faith, a “community of communities?” Certainly, our core values—prayer, hospitality, justice and care of the earth—define and direct us as members of Holy Wisdom Monastery. And how could one argue against or about such obvious personal and social goods?

But what about our beliefs? What do we hold in common as intellectual commitments, as shared truths? Ah, there’s the rub. For some, the immediate answer is “Oh, don’t go *there!*” Often based on personal experience, they fear divisive debates about doctrinal correctness and the sense of exclusion that rigid truth claims can create in and among communities of faith. Others, however, claim as a primary personal value intellectual integrity, and they wonder how a

community of faith can grow and deepen without engaging in free, open, and mature conversation about the nature and content of truth itself.

In 2015, the monastery's Spiritual Deepening Council, in keeping with both its name and its mission, decided to "go there." Members of the council created a program focused on exploring the essential elements of ecumenical Christianity. As a source of content, the council chose Marcus Borg's exceptional book, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (Harper Collins, 2003). Described by his wife as a book "for lovers of faith and those seeking a faith to love," the book takes on such fundamental themes as faith, God, Jesus, sin and salvation, and Christian belonging in terms of both their "earlier" and "emerging" meanings. In 2015, two groups of 12 experienced the program. It is currently being attended by 20 people from Sunday Assembly, the oblates, and other local faith communities.

The program is defined as much by its methodology as its content. By adapting the spiritual practices of *lectio divina* and contemplative dialog, and grounding the sessions in both shared and silent prayer, the program avoids the negative connotations often associated with discussions of religious belief. On the contrary, participants experience a real deepening of their personal spirituality along with a genuine sense of belonging within a gathering of fellow seekers.



Participants get to know each other during a break in the class.

We encourage you to look for and support future offerings from the Spiritual Deepening Council. For information, click on "Spirituality programs" on the homepage of the monastery's website, or pick up program flyers in the display rack at the monastery's entrance.

Do you want to enrich your spiritual life?

by [Carolyn McGinley](#), director of communications

The Spiritual Deepening Council (SDC) at Holy Wisdom Monastery is a small group of volunteers who meet five times per year to plan and implement adult spiritual enrichment programs for the monastery. For the past five years the group has been guided by this question:

Will what we are offering enhance the contemplative life of individuals and the Holy Wisdom community?

During this time, Pamela Johnson and Tom Zanzig co-chaired the council. "Pamela and Tom with the help of the council have created quality programs for people who want to deepen their spiritual lives. The sisters and monastery staff are grateful to all the individuals who volunteer on the council and who tirelessly line up speakers and classes at Holy Wisdom," thanked Sister Mary David Walgenbach.

In January of 2016 the council formed a Spiritual Deepening Council Associate position. Associates are individuals whose work is so closely aligned with the mission of Holy Wisdom Monastery and the purposes of the SDC that they become important partners in the work of enhancing the contemplative life of individuals and the community. Beth O'Brien is the first person to become a Spiritual Deepening Council Associate.

Over the five years, the council has offered 45 programs with more than 300 individuals attending one or more offerings.

Pamela and Tom stepped down as co-chairs at the end of 2017 and David McKee and Rachel Olson picked up where they left off as the 2018 Spiritual Deepening Council co-chairs.

Before Pamela and Tom ended their time with the council, they worked with the council and developed the [programs for 2018](#).

- [The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith](#), a six-part series starting January 8, 2018 (registration closed)
- [Animals and Spiritual Practice: How Animals Connect Us with God](#), February 8, 2018; 6:00-8:00 pm
- [Contemplative Movie Night: With One Voice](#), April 24, 2018; 7:00-9:00 pm
- [Seeing the Sacred: Exploring Personal Images of the Divine](#), a 3-part series starting May 8, 2018; 9:00-11:30 am
- [Women of the Bible: Strength and Wisdom in Image and Word](#), June 5, 2018; 9:00 am-3:30 pm
- [Group Spiritual Direction: An Introduction and Exploration](#) a 4-part series starting July 12, 2018; 9:00-11:30 am
- [Thoughts, Tools and Lectio Divina: A Daily Pathway to Communicating with God](#), a 6-part series starting July 20, 2018; 9:00-11:30 am
- [Early Autumn Contemplative Movie Night: Eastern Mystics, Discovering the Sacred in the Ordinary](#), August 28, 2018; 7:00-9:00 pm

We hope you will attend a program in 2018!

Sisters & Sojourners

The gift of *encuentro*

by [Denise West](#), novice

Last November, Sister Lynne Smith, Sister Paz Vital and I headed up to Milwaukee for a conference on the future of religious communities in the United States. The theme of the conference was *Encuentro*, and the focus was around the great diversity of cultures in this country and the changing face of religious communities as greater numbers of women and men born outside the US join American religious orders. The keynote speaker was Sister Teresa Maya, president-elect of the Leadership Conference for Women Religious. A native of Mexico City, she is a member of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word and lives in San Antonio, Texas. *Encuentro* literally translated is a meeting, a conference, even a sports match, but in Spanish its meaning is dynamic. It is used to reflect two parties coming together and being transformed. As Sister Teresa said, "the call to encounter is a call to journey beyond ourselves...it's not *encuentro* if it leaves you unchanged."

The community of sisters at Holy Wisdom Monastery has certainly changed over time in response to engagement with people of varied backgrounds. Regular visits from the monks of Taizé in the mid-sixties, meetings with clergy members of different denominations, and conversations with members of Madison Interfaith Dialog—all of these experiences prepared the sisters for their *encuentro* with Lutheran missionaries and their families in the 1970s. It was living, praying, and working side by side with people of different backgrounds that deeply changed Sisters Mary David Walgenbach and Joanne Kollasch and inspired them to ultimately open their Catholic community to women of any Christian denomination. This paved the way for the community to receive Sister Lynne and other Protestants like me.

Sister Paz and I experienced *desencuentro*—clashes—during our time as Sojourners as we discovered how utterly differently we see and engage with the world. I have since discovered what it means to

experience the United States as an immigrant and to experience American culture as a person of color and a Mexican woman. This was not easy to hear. At first I listened, (or rather, didn't listen) with my defenses up. But with the help of numerous blog posts, online articles, and podcasts by black and brown people, my hard shell softened enough to be able to hear "with the ear of my heart" (*Rule of Benedict*), and it changed me. It was only over time that we began to truly listen to one another's experiences and see the world as the other sees it.



Our community has become interested in the ways we all see and experience the world differently based on our upbringing and our culture. At lunch some weeks ago, Rev. Al Heggen happened to mention a book his church group had read called, *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* by theologian and activist Drew G.I. Hart. We meet every other week to discuss a chapter, reflecting on what struck us as new, significant or challenging. In one section, Hart names the problem and presents hope for transformation:

For too long, the church has gone about its business as though nothing were wrong. Meanwhile, it has been a racialized organism, not only fractured relationally but actually practicing, perpetuating, or remaining silent to the racial oppression of others.... Jesus lived a life that nonviolently subverted the powers and confronted the establishment.... Jesus can help us transform how we understand and resist racism in our society.

The message for me is one that is consistent with Benedictine spirituality and the monastic life: What are the places in me that keep me separate from my neighbor and from God? How am I blind to my faults and to others' needs? Where do I need transformation? If I haven't listened deeply to the experiences of people who are not white like me and if I haven't noticed the ways in which I've been socialized as an American to see with the eyes of my dominant white culture, then I am still blind to the ways I perpetuate the system, unknowingly. Listening, reading and reflecting are all part of what our community is doing to grow into new understandings and to see with new eyes. We are preparing for more *Encuentros* as Benedictine Women of Madison becomes more culturally diverse.

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

by [Sister Lynne Smith](#), co-director of formation

*Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
January 21, 2018*



Your Right Hand, O God, Glorious in Power

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2018

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is celebrated in the northern hemisphere from January 18-25. It began in 1908, as an eight day period of prayer called the Church Unity Octave at Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute. Today, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity invites the whole Christian community throughout the world to pray in communion with the prayer of Jesus "that they all may be one" (*John 17:21*).

At Holy Wisdom Monastery, we observe this week with special prayers, hymns and readings at midday prayer Tuesday through Friday and a special bulletin at the ecumenical Eucharist at 9:00 am on Sunday, January 21, 2018.

The line from John's Gospel, "that they all may be one," greets everyone who enters the monastery building at Holy Wisdom. Ecumenism and Christian unity have been part of our ministry since 1966. In May of that year, the executive committee of Madison Interfaith Dialogue proposed to Bishop William O'Connor of the Madison Diocese that the sisters make their facilities and services available to people of other Christian and faith traditions. [You can read the](#)

[resolution here](#). Bishop O'Connor received the resolution favorably and the sisters' ministry has been ecumenical ever since.

Beginning in 1972, the Lutheran Summer Institute for Mission was held at the monastery, then Saint Benedict Center for 16 years. The sisters and the families preparing for their mission work prayed together, played together, ate together and shared their faith stories with one another. As Sister Mary David says, "Praying together changed our hearts."

In 2006, the sisters completed the process of making the sisters' community ecumenical. You can read more of our history on our website at this link: benedictinewomen.org/about/history/ Pope Francis urges Christians: "Walk Together. Work Together. Pray Together." That is what the sisters at Holy Wisdom Monastery have been doing all these years. As we celebrate our 65th year of ministry in Madison, we continue this ecumenical journey and invite you to walk with us.

Guests & Retreatants

A place of silence and renewal

by Jane Ayer, oblate class of 2014

Holy Wisdom Monastery is home to a variety of groups and individuals, all seeking space and arrangements specific to their purposes. Prior to arrival the retreat organizers have submitted requests to the guest services coordinator for spaces, arrangement of furniture and special needs such as sound systems, charts, lighting and food.

In January, 2018 I was one of 90 people from all over the US and Canada who attended a 6-day silent meditation retreat with Tergar International at Holy Wisdom. I was delighted to experience Benedictine hospitality, as a guest rather than as an oblate or volunteer, during my retreat that renewed my spirit.

All is in place when the guests arrive. It is remarkable to enter a room perfectly set up, but with no evidence of preparation. Guests are not subjected to the work of the building staff. Indeed, one can wonder how it all happened with no impingement on retreat activities. Retreat managers are not required to break their silence to attend to arrangements and other details.

It is not only the physical plant details which have been so well attended to, but the food is delicious and beautifully presented with attention to special needs. All food is prepared on site with produce served year-round that was grown in the monastery gardens and harvested by the Benedictine sisters, volunteers and staff of the monastery.

The gift of the monastery to retreatants is an atmosphere totally supportive of the needs of the retreat program. Holy Wisdom Monastery has become a well-known retreat center for groups and individuals of any spiritual persuasion—ecumenical Christians, Buddhists, and secular groups. All leave something of themselves behind, which adds to the richness of the Holy Wisdom experience.



Jane Ayer is a volunteer, oblate and Friend of Wisdom Prairie member at Holy Wisdom Monastery. In January 2018 she attended a Tergar International group retreat at the monastery.

Oblates

Living the Rule brings higher level of self-understanding and self-acceptance

by Marian Wasierski, oblate class of 2014



Let's consider personal change and the essential place of St. Benedict's Chapter 7 right in the middle of the process.

Sister Joan Chittister names humility "the lost virtue." I am challenged to live into this part of the Rule of St Benedict. This past year, however, living into the challenge brought a higher level of self-understanding and self-acceptance.

My angst resurfaced at a retreat last year. I again lamented my unfulfilled desire to be an eloquent, thinking on her feet, engaging speaker. Case in point—when the retreat leader asked the group for questions and comments, I again hesitated trying to formulate a great response as others quickly stood up and to say all the good points and

ask all the insightful questions.

I do not think this distracting desire to be that admirable communicator is from God. It does not have much to do with discerning the truth. It has more to do with needing to prove that I can get it together in the moment, expressing a nugget of deep insight, to show how smart I am.

Sometimes I do have a great comment or question to offer. But often I do not.

And that it's okay was my "aha moment." I asked another person on retreat to open the ear of her heart to my very personal story. I was graciously received and heard her assurance that at times not speaking is appropriate (especially when I really have nothing to say and should be listening!). I also heard her asking me what I might be ashamed of. I had no idea in that moment. But she planted a helpful seed.

Now I feel free to speak up when I have something to contribute. I more readily value and use my other relational gifts—one-on-one conversation, small group process, prepared presentations, writing reflective pieces. And I look for concurrent opportunities to be kinder and to treat others better.

Friends & Supporters

Become a Friend of Wisdom Prairie and ensure the future of our efforts to care for the earth

by [Greg Armstrong](#), director of land management and environmental education

Friends of Wisdom Prairie



The Friends of Wisdom Prairie's purpose is to help the sisters care **for the earth**. Although it is still a fledgling organization (in its 4th year), the organization is mature beyond its years. We as an organization have contributed substantially to the extraordinary advances Holy Wisdom Monastery has made in implementing its comprehensive land management plan. Since its founding in 2014 we have restored 33 acres of new prairie on old corn fields, planted the first of many bur oak trees that will form the woody element of a soon to be 30-acre savanna restoration and just this winter cleared about 8 acres of remnant savanna of non-oak trees. For this last project we used a low impact logging technique where the marketable logs were skidded out of the savanna area with horses, instead of huge log skidder tractors that would have crushed the soil structure. It also proved to be very photogenic.

There are many reasons why people decide to join the Friends of Wisdom Prairie. Some join because they believe in the sister's efforts of caring for the earth and therefore want to express

that support by joining the organization and giving financial support. Some people enjoy the dinner lectures, outings to other natural areas and the opportunity to socialize with people who care about environmental conservation in the same way they do. Others have developed land management skills and wish to participate in the Friends of Wisdom Prairie volunteer workdays which are held every other week during the growing season. They find the work enjoyable, help the sisters make progress in caring for the earth, socialize with others who volunteer and develop wonderful friendships through this work (kind of like going through boot camp together).

So, if you believe in the sisters care for the earth efforts or want to participate in the Friends of Wisdom Prairie events, please join us. We would love to have you be a part of this important, fun and interesting organization. [Join today!](#)

New on our website

Follow the links below to see what's new on our website.

[Contributing to kindness](#) by Sister Lynne Smith

[Book repair at the monastery](#) by Sojourner, Diane Ray

[January phenology \(monthly nature happenings\)](#) by Sylvia Marek

[January new books in the library](#), by Nancy Sandleback

Recent homilies:

- [Leora Weitzman's homily, Jan. 14, 2018](#)
- [David McKee's homily, Dec. 25, 2017](#)

Scripture commentaries by Arthur H. Cash:

- [January 21, 2018](#)
- [January 14, 2018](#)
- [January 7, 2018](#)



Calendar

[Sunday Worship](#), 9:00 am
Monastery Assembly Room

[Daily Prayer](#)

Monastery Oratory

Morning Prayer, Sunday-Saturday, 8:00 am

Midday Prayer, Monday-Friday, 11:45 am

Evening Prayer, Sunday-Saturday, 4:30 pm

[Centering Prayer](#)

Monastery Oratory

Morning Centering Prayer, Tuesday-Saturday, 7:35 am

Evening Centering Prayer, Tuesday-Friday, 4:55 pm

Retreat & Guest House Room 10
Centering Prayer Group, Wednesdays, 7:00 pm

Follow the links below to learn more or register for upcoming events at Holy Wisdom Monastery

For the complete calendar visit holywisdommonastery.org/events

January 21
Sunday Assembly Childcare Ministry, 9:00-10:00 am

January 28
Children's Liturgy of the Word, 9:00-10:00 am

Hospitality and Car Pool Sunday

January 30
Friends of Wisdom Prairie Tour: Snowshoe under the moon; 7:00-8:30 pm



Enjoy the experience of seeing monastery land under the moon from snow shoes. We can't guarantee the moon will not be covered by clouds nor if there will be any snow on the ground. However, we will have a great time seeing the monastery from this perspective, no matter the weather, with naturalist and birder Sylvia Marek.

Bring your own snowshoes or borrow a pair from the monastery. (We have 10 pairs left—first come; first served.) This is going to be a hoot!

No registration necessary, just come.

February 4
Sunday Assembly Childcare Ministry, 9:00-10:00 am

Anointing of the Sick

After worship in the oratory on the lower level of the monastery we will offer a special prayer for healing. All are invited to participate in this special liturgy. The prayer will last about 20 minutes depending upon the number of people attending.

February 8
Animals and Spiritual Practice; 6:00-8:00 pm; \$30

In this fascinating evening Leora Weitzman will guide us in exploring the inner life of animals, the spiritual aspects of ourselves that animals bring out, companion animal loss and grief, and communication with animals as contemplative practice.



[Register by February 1, 2018](#)

February 10
A Day Away: Reconnect with God, Self and Creation, 9:30-5:00 pm
A retreat for single women, ages 30-50



Do you need a day away to unplug from your busy life and reconnect with yourself and God? This day retreat, led by the sisters at Holy Wisdom Monastery, offers time to connect with your deepest self, God and other single women through the beauty of nature. You will have time and space for reflection alone and with others. The retreat includes prayer, journaling, walking meditation on our nature trails and lunch.

If you would like more time for yourself, you may come for Friday night and/or stay Saturday night for an additional charge. Overnight space is limited.

Costs:

\$30 for the day including lunch; Student cost - \$20
Additional Saturday dinner - \$10
Additional night stay (Friday/Saturday night) - \$71/night
Scholarships are available.

Questions? Contact Sister Lynne at 608-831-9305 or lwsmith@benedictinewomen.org

[Register by February 3, 2018](#)

February 11
Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus

Children's Liturgy of the Word, 9:00-10:00 am

Social Justice Group, 10:30-11:30 am

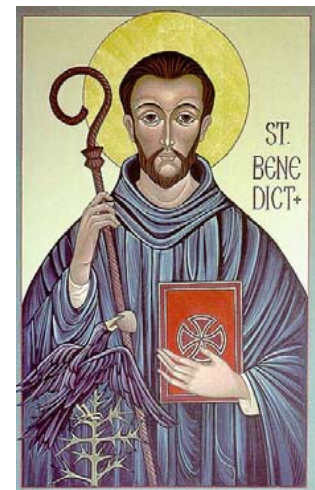
Youth Ministry: Centering Prayer with Beth O'Brien, 10:15-11:30 am

February 13
Luke House

February 14
Ash Wednesday
11:45 am — Midday Prayer and Distribution of Ashes
5:30 pm — Ash Wednesday Evening Service followed by a Light Supper. The monastery will provide soup; those attending are asked to bring salad, bread, cheese or dessert to share.

February 16-18
Oblate retreat (open to the public)
Neighbor, Citizen, Benedictine led by oblate Jan Conrady
In the current political milieu, how can we be faithful to our spiritual wisdom and the Benedictine path? In an age where information is becoming suspect, how do we advocate for the values we believe in? During the retreat, we will build a framework to answer these questions, but the emphasis is on "WE." The most important parts of this weekend are your questions, your stories and your hard-won wisdom in these times. Bring a mind willing to be open to finding common threads in very disparate paths. Please come prepared with some questions written before the retreat.

We will begin with the framework of Parker Palmer's book *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* to launch our discussion. It is helpful but not at all necessary to have read the book. What orbits we find, we will find



together in reflection and storytelling. We may run out of time before we run out of material. But we will pray God sends us what we need to move forward in hope.

[Register by February 2, 2018](#)

February 18
First Sunday of Lent

Sunday Assembly Childcare Ministry, 9:00-10:00 am

Sunday Assembly Council Meeting, 10:30-11:45 am

February 21
Lenten Lunch, Ecumenism: The Truth as One, 11:45 am-1:30 pm

In this, the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation, we experience and explore the many voices of Christianity and the call of the monastery to be grounded in unity.

Via Media (Latin phrase translated as "middle way" or way between two extremes) led by Al Majkrzak. Al was ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1979. Al believes strongly in ecumenism and lives that out as an Oblate of Holy Wisdom Monastery and a member of Sunday Assembly.

February 25
Children's Liturgy of the Word, 9:00-10:00 am

Hospitality and Car Pool Sunday

February 28
Lenten Lunch, Ecumenism: The Truth as One, 11:45 am-1:30 pm

In this, the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation, we experience and explore the many voices of Christianity and the call of the monastery to be grounded in unity.

Hearts Strangely Warmed: The Essence of Methodism led by Rachel Olson. Rachel received her Elders (full ordination) in 2005 and began serving as a full time pastor to a variety of United Methodist congregations around Wisconsin. She is a member of Holy Wisdom Monastery's Sunday Assembly and currently serves as co-chair of the Spiritual Deepening Council.

[Visit our website calendar for all of our upcoming events at holywisdommonastery.org/events/](http://www.holywisdommonastery.org/events/)

[Forward this message to a friend](#)



Holy Wisdom Monastery

4200 County Road M, Middleton, WI 53562 | Phone: 608-836-1631

Website: www.holywisdommonastery.org | Email: info@benedictinewomen.org