

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

[Sisters & Sojourners](#) | [Sunday Assembly](#) | [Oblates](#) | [Guests & Retreatants](#)
[Friends & Supporters](#) | [Volunteers & Coworkers](#) | [New on our website](#) | [Calendar](#)

July 2018



The Benedictine sisters and staff at Holy Wisdom Monastery welcome all people to visit the monastery and experience the peaceful setting, warm and respectful Benedictine hospitality, inclusive communities and renewing spirit. Visit HolyWisdomMonastery.org to learn more.

Sisters & Sojourners

First profession

by [Sister Denise West, OSB](#), Benedictine Women of Madison

After an inspiring weekend of the Caring for Common Ground workshop led by Greg Armstrong, Cheryl Bauer-Armstrong and Claire Bjork, then two weeks away at St. John's University, I returned home just in time to welcome my sister, Camille West, for a visit to the monastery for my first profession. We spent time in the garden, in Madison, and around the prairie, and excitement was building in me for the big day.



Sister Mary David Walgench, prioress (right) in dialogue with novice Denise West, First Monastic Profession. Photo by Kate Stel.

As I recall that moment standing expectantly in line outside the assembly room, two of my soon-to-be Benedictine sisters in front, and two behind me, Psalm 139 comes to mind. *You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.* My Sisters Joanne Kollasch, Mary David Walgenbach, Lynne Smith and Paz Vital *hem me in* in the most wonderful way. They walk before me and behind me, comforting me and challenging me, and holding me in place. It is the work of being in relationship with one another that is the monastic path to salvation as

we live, pray, suffer with and forgive one another in all our messy humanity. My sisters' hands are upon me, guiding and shaping me, with God's grace, into a more genuine version of myself. I am bound to them and they to me in the hope of becoming more generous and loving people.

I can't express the fullness of my heart as we entered to the sound of the whole assembly singing, 'O God, Beyond All Praising.' Though my original family is small, I felt surrounded by my spiritual family, everyone lifting me up and supporting me as I took the next step in committing myself to the Benedictine Women of Madison and all the communities of Holy Wisdom Monastery. It was a mutual commitment, as we all participated in singing the *Suscipe*, "Sustain me, O God, as you have promised that I may live, and disappoint me not in my hope!" We promise to love one another, and grow deeper and more vulnerable in our relationships with one another. As we do so, Benedict tells us that our hearts will expand in our capacity to love (*Rule of Benedict*, Prologue). This is the life I am drawn to and I am grateful beyond all telling (to paraphrase the hymn) to be sharing it with all of you who participate in the life of Holy Wisdom Monastery. Thanks be to God!

Becoming a Benedictine Sojourner

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

Single women in transition between jobs or between college and graduate school have used the [Benedictine Sojourner](#) experience to live in community with the sisters, learn Benedictine spirituality and values, and reflect on the meaning and purpose of their life.

Women who become Sojourners receive formation in community living skills and an opportunity for personal and spiritual growth through reflection and the daily rhythm of Benedictine life. Sojourners work 20 hours a week in the mission and ministry of the monastery. At the end of six months women take the skills they have gained into their daily lives. Any single, Christian women, 24-50, interested in this experience should contact Sister Lynne Smith at 608-831-9305 or lwsmith@benedictinewomen.org.



Come and learn about the Benedictine Sojourner program at a weekend retreat

The sisters offer [Experience Benedictine Life at the Monastery](#), August 25-26, 2018 and November 3-4, 2018, as a way for single, Christian women, 24-50, who are interested in the Benedictine

Sojourner experience to meet the sisters, learn about Holy Wisdom Monastery and begin to discern if the Sojourner experience is right for them.

Please share this article with single women who may be interested.

[Submit an interest form for the retreat by August 11, 2018](#)

Continuing education focuses on the body

by Sister Denise West, OSB, Benedictine Women of Madison



Sister Denise West (left) hikes at St. John's University with Sister Marie Racine of Our Lady of Grace Monastery, Beech Grove, Indiana.

During the last week of June and the first week of July, I was fortunate to travel to beautiful Collegeville, MN to take two classes in the Benedictine Studies program at St. John's University. The first class, Passions & Prayer: Early Monastic Insights into Human Psychology and Spiritual Practices, taught by Father Columba Stewart, OSB, took us into the writings of ancient philosophers, church fathers and early desert monastics. The second one, taught by Sister Carmel Posa, SGS, was Body, Being and Becoming: Explorations of the Body in the *Rule of Benedict*. Though they may sound very different, I found a convergence between them around the theme of one's relationship to the body.

Epictetus wrote in the second century, "Of all existing things, some are in our power and others are not in our power." He said that, essentially, if we concern ourselves with things which are in our power, and not those outside of our power, we will lead a happy and meaningful life; otherwise we will be miserable. So simple! And yet, he says, to achieve this state of affairs, "to attain [it] requires more than ordinary effort." There's the challenge. We all know from experience that it takes more than ordinary effort not to worry about things we cannot control, or to turn to God in trust when we are flooded with fears and anxieties. The desert monks knew this and developed ascetical practices that helped to train their bodies and minds so that they became purified of interfering thoughts that separate us from the mind of Christ. The fourth century philosopher and theologian Evagrius enumerated the eight thoughts as: gluttony, lust, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, pride and vainglory. Gregory the Great later remade them into the Seven Deadly Sins, but the early writers attributed no judgment to the thoughts; they simply are part of being human. Our challenge in the spiritual life is to know how they operate in us and to develop ways of managing our impulses and desires, in a sense to tame them, so that they do not control us. I find this approach comforting, as it becomes merely one more way that I come to know and accept myself.

Sister Carmel's class about the body in the *Rule of Benedict* shaped my understanding of the ascetical practices around the body—particularly gluttony, as emotional eating is one of my favorite ways of coping with stress. Instead of framing the conversation in my head around, 'to eat or not to eat' in a headlong battle with the demon of gluttony, which I will almost always lose, I began to listen (as Benedict urges us) to what my desire is telling me. I try to have a relationship with my compulsion rather than instantly pushing it away. Yes, Epictetus, this requires 'more than ordinary effort'! In fact, the early writers all agree, the only way to achieve transformation and freedom from our thoughts and compulsions is through the grace of God. Only then will abstinence, which is an act of human will, be transformed into chastity, or purity of heart, in which the desire to act contrary to God's will has dissipated if not disappeared.

All the readings, writing and discussions with those gathered for the classes—lay people, monks and sisters from around the world—inspired me and strengthened my commitment to the monastic way of life. Morning and evening prayer with the monks in the Abbey nurtured my spirit as did walking in the woods, hearing the music of the loons on Lake Sagatagan, and spotting the dazzling dragonflies that hovered over the water. It was a wonderfully refreshing two weeks for which I am grateful. And I was very glad when it came time to return to Holy Wisdom and my own community!

Oblates

Manual labor as Benedictine practice

by Heidi Haverkamp, Oblate class of 2014

In the *Rule of Benedict*, the work of human hands is an intimate partner to the work of prayer. Benedict encouraged his communities to work with their hands, not just to support themselves financially, but to find balance, share the hard work, and not get stuck in their heads or mental prayers. For instance, serving at meals is as important as answering the door or attending the daily office: *Let the brethren serve one another, and let no one be excused from the kitchen service except by reason of sickness or occupation in some important work. For this service brings increase of reward and of charity (chapter 35)*. Basic tasks and manual work are good for living in community and for the life of the spirit.



The body is not a husk, but holy. Christ was revealed to us in the birth of Jesus as a real, fleshy baby; he lived and died in a human body. Our bodies are a means to know God, too. At the monastery, worship, which might seem purely spiritual, is, in fact, quite physical, both in the daily office and at Sunday Assembly: we gather together as a body, *in person*, and we do things with our bodies like sing, bow, make the sign of the cross, embrace, and receive communion.

In Benedictine spirituality, the body is a partner to the soul and so, I have found manual labor a rich spiritual practice. Whether folding laundry, painting a room, pulling weeds, doing dishes at the monastery, or cooking a meal at home, accomplishing tasks with my body brings balance to my life. It reminds me of the value of labor in the life of our society. It makes housework and chores less tedious! Most important, it helps me find my center and remember that God is there with me, in my body and in my soul.

Hospitality and compassion

by Carole Krestchman, Oblate class of 2000



I am a mother, daughter, sister, aunt and grandmother. And I am a number 2 on the Enneagram. We tend to be busy. Being busy gives me many opportunities to slow down, pause, yearn for simplicity and balance in my life. Benedictine values like hospitality, simplicity, a daily rhythm of prayer and work and holy leisure drew me in. I worked all of my life in health care where I extended myself for the good of others. Years ago, I ran across the following quote:

Those who have given to others
and found it depleting
have not taken the time to give fully to themselves first.

Always give to others of the overflow
and if you are giving to yourself
unconditionally,
the overflow will always be
more than enough.

I found there is no signal within myself to let me know when I have depleted the well/overflow. There are signs such as impatience, anger, frustration, and an overall apathy.

Three years ago, I attended a conference on the Healing Power of Sustainable Compassion Practices. An oblate friend commented, "This is all about hospitality"—hospitality to self, others and the world. These Tibetan practices assist us in receiving the goodness and love flowing into our lives. And balances our tendencies to overextend ourselves. Join us as we explore hospitality and compassion, September 21-23, 2018 during the Benedictine Retreat at Holy Wisdom Monastery. All are welcome.



[Learn more](#)

[Register by September 7, 2018](#)

Friends & Supporters

Participants find common ground

By Claire Bjork, Earth Partnership

This past June, the first-ever Caring for Common Ground interfaith restoration education workshop was hosted at Holy Wisdom Monastery. This pilot program grew out of the hope that people of diverse faith and spiritual understandings can come together to learn about and do ecological restoration, repairing and renewing connections to each other and the earth, our literal "common ground." The program is a community-based collaborative effort convened by Holy Wisdom and Earth Partnership (a restoration education program at UW-Madison). Funding for the workshop was provided by the High Winds Association Foundation.



During the Friday to Sunday workshop, 17 of us gathered from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds, including Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Unitarian, Pagan, and Secular Humanist. The primary goals of the workshop were to support dialogue about what restoration means to people from different traditions and understandings, to learn practical land care skills, and to foster a community of practice for people working on land care issues within a spiritual context.

Since we were developing a pilot program that involves new directions for both Holy Wisdom and the Earth Partnership model of restoration

education, we did not quite know what would come out of the workshop. It became clear very early on that the workshop provided a needed sustaining space; even our introductions were heartfelt and emotional, as participants shared about their personal faith journeys and spiritual understandings, and belief in the importance of connecting with each other through environmental care. Some participants noted that they had been in religious traditions that had not supported their environmental commitments, others had been involved in environmental action that did not make space for spiritual exploration and connections. Having a space where we could generate collective wisdom and provide mutual support for spiritually-rooted restoration was a new and refreshing experience. One participant described it as “restoring the restorers.”

The Monastery provided a beautiful and inspiring living classroom for hands-on activities exploring site analysis, soil, mapping, plant identification and selection, watersheds, macroinvertebrate sampling, and collaborative design techniques. We also had space for individual reflection and dialogue and shared meals, readings, songs, and a campfire. The group bonded quickly during our three days together. One participant described it as “an uplifting, loving education development—and even more so—spiritual development experience that prepares people to act their values more effectively.”



Participants have committed to integrating their program experience into some restoration practice during the course of the next year. Program leaders have also committed to supporting their efforts, and the group will meet again soon, likely in the early fall. As the program continues to evolve, anyone who is interested is invited to join this growing community of restoration practice. If you would like more information, please contact Greg Armstrong (Holy Wisdom Monastery, garmstrong@benedictinewomen.org) or Claire Bjork (Earth Partnership, cshaller@wisc.edu).

Community members create art for summer exhibit

by [Rachel Olson](#), development program manager

Memories, the third annual Summer Art Exhibit opens Sunday Aug. 5, 2018 at 10:30 am. This exhibit features the artwork of Sunday Assembly members, volunteers, Oblates, Friends of Wisdom Prairie members and other members of Holy Wisdom's community-of-communities. The exhibit will open with a reception after 9:00 am worship. Refreshments will be served in the gathering area and the artists will be on hand to visit and answer questions. Spread the word! This event is open to all and we encourage friends and visitors to join us (no registration necessary). After the opening, the exhibit will be open to the public Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, and on Sundays from 9:00 to 11:30 am. *Photo titled The Face of Alzheimer's Disease by Elaine Pasinski Thomas will be part of the exhibit.*



The little things

by [Janet Neurauter](#), director of mission advancement

Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things.
-Robert Brault



Recently a visitor stopped by the office just to say hello. "I heard a cardinal as I was walking up from the Retreat and Guest House," she exclaimed. "I couldn't see him in the trees, but it was enough for me just to know he was there."

What a gem of a thought—on so many levels. She stopped and paid attention to what was happening in the moment. She didn't need to actually see the cardinal to appreciate his gift of song. Sometimes it's enough

just to know "it's there."

Last year a note was carefully folded around a check from a donor who lives several states away from Holy Wisdom. In neat handwriting, the person wrote, "I am not able to come to Holy Wisdom very often, but I'm sending this gift so you can continue your good work. Just knowing you're there, that you offer hospitality to everyone, that you're taking care of the land, means so much to me. God bless you."

Holy Wisdom Monastery has been here for 65 years—and that is something to celebrate! Some people are here every week; some people live far away and come when they are able. But just knowing we're here is sometimes enough. A little thing—that can turn into a big thing.

[Click here to support the work of the monastery in weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and care for the earth into a shared way of life](#)

Thank you for your gift and support!

Unsung literary legend, Willa Cather, celebrated at Holy Wisdom this summer

by [Rachel Olson](#), development program manager



"The earth was warm under me, and warm as I crumbled it through my fingers....I kept as still as I could. Nothing happened. I did not expect anything to happen. I was something that lay under the sun and felt it, like the pumpkins, and I did not want to be anything more. I was entirely happy. Perhaps we feel like that when we die and become a part of something entire, whether it is sun and air, or goodness and knowledge. At any rate, that is happiness; to be dissolved into something complete and great. When it comes to one, it comes as naturally as sleep." —Willa Cather, My Antonia

September 27, 2018.

In addition, Holy Wisdom received a donation from UW-Whitewater's Young Auditorium of 100 copies of *"My Antonia."* Books will be available on a first-come, first-served basis in late July. Beginning in August, there will be opportunities to take part in a book discussion group. Further details will be available soon on the Holy Wisdom website, Sunday Assembly bulletins, and social media.

If you've not heard of Willa Cather until now, you're not alone. Her legacy is proof that history sometimes plays favorites.

Willa was a contemporary of Jack London, William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In the early years of the 20th century she was the foremost woman in American journalism. By the mid-1940s she had written 12 novels, won the Pulitzer Prize, graced the cover of *Time*, and received the Gold Medal of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. She was renowned for her stories about growing up on the Nebraska prairie. And yet today, there are many who are just now rediscovering one of America's greatest literary figures.

Though not a household name, Willa Cather is not without her avid fans and champions. Groups such as the Willa Cather Project have been actively seeking to bring her life and work the recognition it deserves. This summer, the communities of Holy Wisdom will take part in this effort in two exciting and historic ways. A Big Read and a Concert.

As it turns out, both Holy Wisdom Monastery and Willa's bestselling novel share an anniversary. For Holy Wisdom it is 65 years. For Willa's break out book, *"My Antonia,"* 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of its publication.

In honor of this milestone, prize-winning composer and pianist Brent Endstrom created a musical tribute to Willa titled *"Prairie Songs: Remembering Antonia,"* that also features tenor, Scott Miller and violinist Tana Bachman-Bland. Holy Wisdom is extremely fortunate to engage *"Prairie Songs"* for this year's Prairie Rhapsody concert on

Native bees and their conservation in Wisconsin's landscapes

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

August 15, 2018
5:30-8:00 pm

Enjoy a dinner at the monastery and learn about bees and the role they play in the ecology of Wisconsin's landscapes from Professor Claudio Gratton of the UW-Madison Entomology Department.



[Register by
August 1, 2018](#)

We remember



Our thoughts and prayers are extended to the families and friends of the following:

Roger Hauck, friend of Holy Wisdom Monastery and member of the Benedictine Women of Madison Board of Directors. Roger passed away on July 8, 2018.

Michelle Wallis, daughter of oblate Sue Miller, who passed away on July 12, 2018.

We celebrate the gifts they shared and rejoice in the promise of eternal life.

New on our website

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

[Rodent wrangling and ambiguity](#) by Kate Stel

[Living our intention](#) by Sister Lynne Smith

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

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



Recent homilies:

- [Paul Knitter's homily, June 24, 2018](#)
- [Wayne Sigelko's homily, June 17, 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

July 25

Wisdom Prairie Workday, 9:00 am-12:00 pm
Volunteer on the grounds of Holy Wisdom Monastery as we care for the earth.
[Register one day or more before the workday.](#)

Sapphire Soirée, 5:30-9:30 pm
65th anniversary gala

July 28-29

A Weekend Away
A spiritual retreat for all women

July 29

Hospitality and Car Pool Sunday

August 5

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

Memories, art exhibit opening, 10:30 am

August 8

Wisdom Prairie Workday, 9:00 am -12:00 pm
[Register one day or more before the workday.](#)

August 12

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

August 12
Social Justice Group, 10:30-11:30 am

August 14
Luke House

August 15
Friends of Wisdom Prairie Dinner Lecture, 5:30-8:00 pm
Enjoy a reception and dinner at the monastery and learn about bees and the role they play in the ecology of Wisconsin's landscapes from Professor Claudio Gratton of the UW-Madison Entomology Department. [Register by August 1, 2018.](#)

August 19
Sunday Assembly Childcare Ministry, 9:00-10:00 am

Inservice for Communion Ministers to the Homebound, 10:30-11:30 am, community dining room
This is an opportunity for members of the Pastoral Care Team and any other who may be interested to receive training in ministry to visiting the sick and homebound.

August 22
Wisdom Prairie Workday, 9:00 am-12:00 pm
[Register one day or more before the workday.](#)

August 25-26
[Experience Benedictine Life at the Monastery](#)
Single, Christian women ages 24-50 learn about the 6-month Benedictine Sojourner experience at the monastery on this weekend retreat. [Fill out an interest form by August 11, 2018.](#)

August 26
Children's Liturgy of the Word, 9:00-10:00 am

Hospitality and Car Pool Sunday

August 28
Early Autumn Contemplative Movie Night:
Eastern Mystics, Discovering the Sacred in the Ordinary, 7:00-9:00 pm
In this groundbreaking documentary, well-known mystics from the Buddhist, Hindu, Advaita, and Taoist traditions discuss their own awakening experiences, the nature of mysticism, religious tolerance, love and compassion, spiritual practices. For more information and to register visit www.contemplativepresence.org/new-products/contemplative-movie-night-ii

For the complete calendar visit holywisdommonastery.org/events



Holy Wisdom Monastery

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

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