



SPRING 2002

# ST. GERTRUDE'S Canticle

A JOURNAL OF OUR LIFE

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## Stay in Touch!

PHONE:  
Monastery  
(208) 962-3224

Museum  
(208) 962-7123

EMAIL:  
monastery@camasnet.com  
vocation@camasnet.com  
retreat@camasnet.com  
develop@camasnet.com

WEBSITE:  
www.StGertrudes.org

## At Home in Sarnen, Switzerland

by Sr. Cecile Uhlorn

Each morning opening the shutters of my window I am awestruck by the overwhelming presence of the Alps encircling the town of Sarnen, Switzerland.

Here stands the almost 400 year old Benedictine Kloster (monastery) St. Andreas with its 19 nuns, ages 27 to 93 years. This Kloster was the home of the three young nuns – Srs. Johanna Zumstein, Rosalia Ruebli and Magdalena Suter – who, in 1882, were sent to the newly settled northwest as missionaries. These three brave women were responsible for the foundation of the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho.

How did I, a child rooted in the deep dark soil of the Camas Prairie, come to be living here at this Kloster and what do I do here?

In 1982 St. Gertrude's Monastery celebrated its centennial. Highlighting this celebration was a presentation of the history of our community's founding with its many trials, tribulations and joys. Two nuns from Sarnen, Srs. Mechthild Duss and Bernarda Lenz visited us during the summer. I was deeply moved by all that I heard and a desire to visit Sarnen began to grow in my heart.

This wish to visit the monastery of our founding came true in 1998 when I was offered a sabbatical year with permission to spend some time in St. Andreas Kloster. I earn my board as an organist for the community.



Sr. Cecile in front of a 350 year-old painting of St. Scholastica in the Kloster in Sarnen, Switzerland.

Little did I realize how challenging my task as an organist would be! First, I had to reacquaint myself with the art of playing a pipe organ. In the beginning it was difficult to play in the Mass because all my verbal "clues" were in German, an unfamiliar language. This also made accompanying the sung Vespers next to impossible as there are no pauses between the psalms or other prayers. All in all, this task proved to be not only an exercise in humility and patience, but also a delight in learning something new.

The chief ministry of the sisters in the Kloster is prayer. Seven times each day the sisters

gather to pray the traditional Hours of the Divine Office – from Lauds and Mass at 6:00 am to Compline at 7:30 pm. Every day many people come to the door requesting prayers, material assistance and spiritual guidance. Morning, noon and night local people and pilgrims come to pray through the intercession of the *Sarner Jesuskind*, a much-loved and venerated image of the Child Jesus.

As I walk through the halls of this Kloster I experience monastic rootedness to the center of my soul. Just a few steps from my room hangs a painting of Sr. Scholastica von Wyll (d. 1650). She was the last

See "Switzerland" on page 4



# Greetings from the Prioress

Dear Friends of the Monastery,

Here we are, well into the year 2002, our 120th year in the Northwest. In the spirit of celebration, I wish you a year filled with abundant blessings. I also thank you for being blessings to us in the many ways that you love and support us in our mission and ministries.

This first issue of *The Canticle* for 2002 focuses on **Monastic Rootedness**. What an appropriate theme as we conclude Lent having spent six weeks striving to deepen our spiritual rootedness in God and in the Christian community.

Spiritual rootedness or stability is an essential monastic value. When St. Benedict wrote *The Rule*, he described a type of monk called “gyrovagues,” monks who spent their entire lives drifting from region to region, staying as guests for a few days in different monasteries. Benedict says these monks are “always on the move, they never settle down, and are slaves to their own wills and gross appetites.”

Benedict set up monasteries in order that people could seek God together, living under the same roof, following the same rules and being led by the same abbot or prioress. By vowing stability in the monastery (or community) of their profession, obedience to the abbot or prioress, and fidelity to one another monastic men and women focus on developing their spiritual lives *together*.

Benedict knew that becoming rooted in things spiritual is essential for life. In order to develop these roots each of us must have

people in our lives who call us to continual growth into the fullness of Christian discipleship. They must also be people willing to confront us when we are not growing.

The holiness to which each of us is called does not happen in a vacuum. It has something to do with the way we live in our community, in our family, and in our public lives, as well as the way we pray.

And our prayer, if it is to be like the prayer of Jesus, will always call us out of ourselves into service to the least among us, the poor and the disadvantaged of this world.

My prayer is that each of us grow in spiritual rootedness. Just as Christ suffered, died and was buried, and was raised to new life on that first Easter, so must we sink our roots deeply into God, the Ground of our being, that God may raise up new life in us.

Know that you and your loved ones are remembered daily in our prayer. Please keep us in your prayers, too, that we may remain deeply rooted in our God who calls us together as a monastic people into a future filled with hope and newness of life.

May God bless you!

Sr. Jean Lalande, Prioress

## Editor’s Note

We’ve covered a lot of ground the last eight issues of *The Canticle*. We’ve explored the great Benedictine saints and how the examples of their lives have meaning for this day and age. Then we delved into the transforming power of God in our lives and how it is manifested in and through our work, technology, our governance and holy leisure.

This year we commemorate the 120th anniversary of the arrival in the Northwest of the three founding Swiss sisters.

120 years! What an amazing amount of time in this young land that we call home. It seems a miracle when anything – a family, an institution, a government, a tradition – lasts that long these days.

Have you ever heard it exclaimed, or even said it yourself, “He looks just like Aunt Agatha!” or “You’ve got your grandfather’s temper.” or “Her nose ...”

What traits give definition and recognition to this long-lived community of Benedictine women? Which characteristics have been passed down through the generations and are visible in members today? Which values will strengthen and grow this community into the future?

The next four issues of *The Canticle* will explore four “genetic traits” of this community: monastic rootedness, pioneering tenacity, contemplative awareness and hope.

Like “uncle John’s musical talent” these values describe the community of yesterday and today. They define it and make it recognizable. Eventually they will manifest themselves in the monastic community of the future.

And “like her mother’s eyes” they will be passed along to the following generations of Benedictine Sisters of St. Gertrude.

# From Cats to Kids: A Century of Caring

Sr. Radegunda (Frieda Mary) Bischofberger was born March 28, 1902, in Switzerland. One of nine children, the tiny girl easily beat her larger brothers at foot races. Her bright eyes and round face led her brothers to call her “moon face” for fun.

She knew when she was 12 years old that she wanted to become a missionary and wear a white veil and habit. She got a job at a woolen factory and worked in various homes after school. She spent one year in training to become a kindergarten teacher. Then, in 1923 she got serious about her vocation and decided to go to America to fulfill her dream of being a missionary.

Sr. Radegunda went door-to-door to raise money for her long passage to the US. Her family supported her decision to become a sister but wished she would join a convent closer, like in Switzerland! But God had put it into her head to go, and so, in August 1923, Radegunda set sail.

She and four other young Swiss sisters arrived at St. Gertrude’s in mid-September. She recalls that she didn’t suffer from seasickness during the trip. “I spiced my black coffee from a small bottle of whiskey and it kept me in good health ... until the waiter noticed it! Prohibition! Unlawful!”

Life in America was something else! Sr. Radegunda immediately began learning English at St. Gertrude’s. Once she could communicate well enough, she was off to serve in the missions for the next 43 years. Her first stop was at St. Michael’s Monastery in Cottonwood, ID. Others graced by her cheerful presence: Holy Rosary School in Pomeroy, WA; St. Valentine’s in Wendell, ID; Greencreek School in Greencreek, ID; St. Joseph’s School in Genesee, ID; Our Lady of Consolation Hospital in Cotton-



**Clockwise from top left: Sr. Radegunda in the kitchen at the new St. Mary’s Hospital; taking care of the cats; with friend and former monastery chaplain Fr. Dan Pekarske.**

wood, ID; St. Benedicts in Jerome, ID; St. Mary’s in Cottonwood and then back to the monastery to work as the dietician, kitchen helper and museum aid.

Some of Sr. Radegunda’s funniest stories deal with learning English. She remembers hearing the word *corpulent*. Believing it to be such a fine word, so big, so nice, she “said it to a lady whose face changed color!” Radegunda couldn’t figure out what she had done to distress the woman so she went to the office and asked for a definition. She was mortified to find out it meant “fat”!

Another time Radegunda remembers going to the dentist. When he asked her which tooth was bothering her she replied, “The little one upstairs!”

Sr. Radegunda feels blessed to have had such a long life. “With God’s help and my guardian angel” she has kept her faith in God and in her vocation for many years.

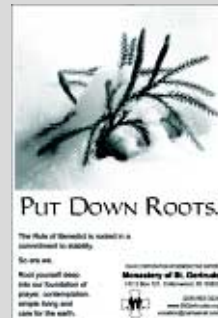
Radegunda’s advice to young women looking at religious life is simple: “Follow your call. You will have much peace if you do.”

# Vocations News

Thanks for all your support of our Vocation Promotions Appeal! We currently have two women in the initial stages of preparing to become novices (called Postulants). We also have four affiliates – women who have determined that they want to move into a closer relationship with the monastery while discerning their vocation.

In January we launched an advertising campaign specifically focused on vocations to the monastery. We are advertising in national

Catholic publications and in regional diocesan newspapers. Look for our new ads which emphasize our commitment to stability and “rootedness.”



Applications are already coming in for our annual Monastic Living Experience, July 1 - 12. Single women, ages 18 - 45, capable of doing

outdoor manual labor are invited to experience life in a 21st century monastery. Participants share in the prayer, work and leisure of the community. Room, board and spiritual guidance are provided. If you or anyone you know is interested in participating, contact Sr. Janet.



Stop by our website and see what’s new!  
www.StGertrudes.org.

# Early Monastic Development

by Sr. Mary Forman

As an Associate Professor in Monastic Studies at the School of Theology, St. John's University in Collegeville, MN, I spend a lot of time researching the roots of monasticism.

The methodical way that early Christians probed the scriptures and pondered how to live their lives for others really caught me on fire about and drove my inquiry into the subject of monasticism. I learned much about this from Father Godfrey Diekmann, OSB, my first teacher at Saint John's in the summer of 1978.

Later I would learn that the roots of the whole monastic movement in the third century started with **women** who lived in household communities and who met for prayer and Bible study.

Women such as Marcella; Melania the Elder; Macrina – sister to Bishops Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa; Paula and her daughter Eustochium – friends of Jerome, famous for translating the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into the Latin Vulgate;

and the ammas Syncretica, Theodora and Sarah. These women were forerunners of the way of life that I, as a Benedictine woman, and my entire monastic community embrace today.

When I read about these great women – or read the few writings we have from some of them – I feel as if I know them. I share their deep desire to grow close to God. I want, just as they did, to give from my talents and prayer life whatever gifts and help I can give to others in need.

Antony the Great is credited with being the first monk. However, before he went off to become a great monk (by God's grace), he put his sister into a convent. This tells me that long before men were credited with

founding monasticism, women had been living it for some time!

I also teach courses on the great medieval women monastic mystics, poets, teachers and musicians – women whose hearts, lives and writings were given to making God's love for the world and its creation known.

Examples include Rade-gunde, queen and foundress of a monastery; Hroswitha, a well-known playwright; Heloise, a philosopher and abbess; Hildegard, a visionary, musician and herbalist/healer; and Gertrude (pictured, from our Icon in the monastery entrance), mystic and spiritual counselor to many.

These are just a few examples of the great predecessors of the monastic way of life – a way of life that teaches us to embrace the world as God does.



## Switzerland, from Page 1

of the seven nuns who, in February, 1615, left their 500-year old Kloster in Engelberg, walked down the mountain into Sarnen and began Kloster St. Andreas.

Further down the hallway, by the office of Abbess Pia, hangs a depiction of all the abbesses (*magistra* in Engleberg) of both the Sarnen and the Engelberg klosters. It is in the shape of a large tree with many branches and leaves. Written on each leaf is the name and date of every abbess. There are many names on the picture.



St. Andreas Kloster, Sarnen, Switzerland.

Although our two communities separated by an ocean may differ in our lived-expression of monastic life, we share core Benedictine values: living simply and in unity

with nature; practicing hospitality to one another and to guests; and being a powerhouse of prayer for the needs of the world, both near and far.

As I reflect on my privileged time here in Sarnen, words from Psalm 80 come to mind:

*A vine from Egypt (Switzerland) you transplanted ... you cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. The mountains were hidden in its shadow ... Give us new life, and we will call upon your name ... If your face shines upon us, then we shall be safe.*

# A Model of Stability in Los Angeles

by Sr. Elisa Martinez

The last few days, I have been reflecting once again on the five statements of the Conference of American Benedictine Prioresses on Monastic Values. These reflections bring me back to thoughts on being a member of a monastic community in Idaho while living and ministering in Los Angeles. I would like to share some of these thoughts with you.

I have been missioned by my community and the prioress to Los Angeles. The past 15 years have been spent living and working with primarily African-American and Latino/a families who experience violence on many levels.

I believe that this mission is an instrument of conversion for both myself and the monastic community in Cottonwood. Together we experience the struggles and the faith level of a community impacted by drugs, gangs, and violence. Together we question ourselves as individuals and as a community.

In early February I was asked to take in two homeless undocumented women and a child for a few days until they could find work and a place to live (there is only one small shelter available to homeless women with children and it is always filled to capacity).

The women and child stayed with me for a few days while Brother Modesto, the director of our program and Father Richard Estrada, the director of a program working with homeless youth, helped them find work and a place to live.

During their stay with me I taught the women handcrafts that members of my religious community taught me. This work for their hands fills a hunger in their lives for ways of developing their God-given talents in order to cope with their hectic and noisy world. By passing along something as simple as needlework, my monastic commu-

nity has touched their lives in a practical way.

We declare in one of our governing documents, "Of All Good Gifts," that we must speak for the voiceless. Our Benedictine voice is heard in Los Angeles as we confront schools, churches, and other structures that do not want anything to do with our youth (gang members) and their parents.

A couple of weeks ago a bus load of our youth and their parents visited the state capitol in Sacramento, to address the legislature. They do this several times each year in order to share their daily experiences of violence. They desire that people care about what happens to them. They also request funding for programs that create opportunity and which work for systemic change.

Prayer, central to our monastic community, is vitally important to me. I maintain a personal prayer life, but I also share its blessings with my co-workers. When youth are killed or injured I am privileged to guide our staff, our youth and families in praying for the strength to forgive those who harm us. I have the privilege of praying with many women who are exploited and children who are abused.

When visitors enter my apartment one of the first things they notice and ask questions about are the pictures on my wall. I have pictures of my family, friends and of my monastic community (along with our mission statement).

Their inquiries are my opportunity to explain that I am a member of a religious community and that we share a common mission as Idaho Benedictines. Often I spend time pointing out and talking about individual sisters in our community. Visitors love to hear about our elder sisters and are amazed at how long they live. I think that



**Sr. Elisa Martinez bringing conversion to herself, her monastic community and those around her through her example of stability.**

they sometimes feel a part of our community as they learn about us and our way of life.

My landlords, Saul and Eufemia, tell me that they feel proud to be a part of our community. Through our shared prayer, friendship and the many sisters who have visited us here, they have grown to feel an integral part of the community in Idaho.

I believe that the core Benedictine values of creating and maintaining life-long human bonds is reaching a community in Los Angeles desperate for a model of stability. They have the opportunity to experience this potential lifestyle through me and members of my community who come to visit me here in Los Angeles.

*NOTE: Sr. Elisa has worked with Soledad Enrichment Action, Inc. (SEA) in Los Angeles for 15 years providing an example of stability for the youth she serves. SEA provides options for youth involved in gangs and was started by several mothers whose sons were killed in gang violence. Brother Modesto Leon is director of SEA.*



# D E V E L O P M E N T S

by Sr. Mary Kay Henry, Director of Development

How is the development office like Noah? We are preparing for a flood!

In our case, a flood of **STORIES** via e-mail, phone, or letters **sharing fun, serious, inspirational incidents about your connections with the monastery or with one or more of the sisters.** Help us celebrate our 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the Northwest by sharing remembrances about times our paths crossed. It will be fun to share these stories on our website.

Our foundresses came to Oregon in 1882, established St. Andrew's motherhouse and school in Uniontown, WA, two years later. They moved to Colton, WA, in 1894 to meet additional space needs by building St. Scholastica's motherhouse and academy.

Another move to accommodate increased membership led them to found St. Gertrude's in Cottonwood in 1907.

Special thanks to those of you whose pioneering relatives welcomed us at each station on this faith pilgrimage. And thanks to you who continue to encourage and accompany us on our journey of seeking God and serving the people. Building the future.

Let us not forget those of you who made our Plant a Forest Campaign a success! We made our goal of \$30,000 to plant 60,000 tree seedlings. The next three to seven years we will continue our forest management plan which calls for selective logging and reforestation another 250 acres. Building the future.

Trees are also the images on our vocations awareness materials (see samples of our ads on page 3) as we ask God to continue planting new members here – young and mid-life women who feel a call to explore whether life as a Benedictine Sister is the context in which they can best give their gifts in service to others. Please pray for our postulants Jean Ihli and Michele Bateman, and for our four affiliates discerning whether to sink their roots in our community. Building the future.

Has your experience with the monastery planted the idea of leaving a legacy by growing our endowment fund, including us in your will, or making some other deferred gift? Building the future.

## Museum's Victorian Tea Changes Schedule

The annual Mother's Day Victorian Tea is scheduled for Saturday, May 11, 2002, in the monastery's refectory. This event is a wonderful opportunity to treat a mother, daughter, grandmother, or other special person, male or female. Experience a truly unique and memorable afternoon as you enjoy the recreated attire, food, music, and lifestyle of the Victorian era.

In order to accommodate the increased interest in this annual fundraiser, we are changing the format this year to offer two separate seatings: The first from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. and the second from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. (Pacific Time).

Ticket prices remain the same at \$15.00 per person, (and, yes, that is the price for chil-

dren!) with all proceeds to benefit The Historical Museum at St. Gertrude.

Space is limited to 120 guests per seating, so **RESERVATIONS ARE REQUIRED!**

Simply call ahead to the museum at (208) 962-7123 or email [museum@velocity.net](mailto:museum@velocity.net) and let us know how many are in your party and which seating you prefer. We will accept reservations until the day of the event.



The Victorian Tea features a live Victorian Fashion Show. These are the models from last year, decked out in their vintage finery.

There will be two guided tours of the historic Monastery Chapel, scheduled at 2:00 pm and 4:30 pm. The monastery's Book & Gift shop and the Museum will be open as well. Guests will also be able to purchase freshly baked cracked wheat and white bread from the monastery's bakery, as well as raspberry jam and raspberry vinegar made from raspberries picked on the monastery grounds.

# Praying Our Way to Cottonwood, ID

Excerpted from a history written for the monastery's 75th anniversary. Also from *On the Way: The Journey of the Idaho Benedictine Sisters* by Sr. Lucille Nachtsheim.

“About the year 1880 an anti-Catholic movement fostered by the government of those days, swept through Switzerland. In earlier times monks and nuns had been expelled from their convent homes. The religious of this critical period were beginning to expect the same fate.

“In 1882 the Very Reverend Adelhelm Odermatt returned from America in order to obtain help for his newly established mission in Gervais, OR ...

“Three sisters were proposed for the foundation, Srs. M. Rosalia Rubli, M. Magdalen Suter and M. Johanna Zumstein (pictured below). The first two consented readily but the latter was very reluctant. However arrangements were made, and in October 1882 the three named, together with four Benedictine Sisters from Rickenbach, Switzerland, arrived in Gervais, OR. The Sarnen Sisters had been commissioned by their community to found a convent in the new world which might serve as a refuge for the Sarnen community should a persecution break out in Switzerland as it had in other European countries only a few years before.

“Soon after their arrival [they] were asked to take charge of the Indian mission at Grande Ronde. [In] February 1883, the Sarnen Sisters took up the work of teaching the Indians at Grande Ronde.”

Sr. Johanna was appointed leader of the little group of sisters. Two years after their arrival in America she despaired of fulfilling



Aerial view of St. Andreas Kloster in Sarnen, Switzerland.

her mission of founding a *claustra*, or enclosed convent, in America. In her diary she writes “I have been in America nearly two years, and we are no closer to making a foundation. Our motherhouse in Sarnen is disappointed in the delay. I am a failure.”

But in August 1884 Bishop Junger of Nesqually offered the Sarnen sisters a choice of four locations for a convent. After careful consideration and a visit to each, Sr. Johanna selected Uniontown, WA. The townspeople offered to build the sisters a house the following summer. Until then, the three sisters resided in the two-room rectory, the priest having volunteered to find other lodgings.



By March 1885, four more women from Switzerland arrived in Uniontown. In December that same year, they moved into their new building, calling it St. Andrew's Convent.

Sr. Johanna understood that the new monastery in the Northwest would never become a second St. Andreas cloisture from Switzerland.

The needs of the newly settled west called for assisting the settlers and instructing their children. She recalled the move into their new quarters, “There were no stone enclosures. May God erect others around our hearts that we may not, while we are

engaged in the care of souls, forget the Creator!”

Even though the new convent didn't have an enclosing wall and couldn't be considered a cloisture like that of their mother-house, Sr. Johanna and the other pioneers eagerly and devotedly continued in their “holy zeal for the Divine service, the church's prayer, the holy psalmody. On this depends the Divine blessing for their new foundation, their progress, their future.”

The small but growing group of Benedictines relocated to Colton, WA, in 1894. Twelve years later this new motherhouse was bursting at the seams with novices and academy boarders. It was apparent that the thriving community would need to relocate once again. The final move to Cottonwood, ID, occurred in 1907.

For 25 years the new foundation had struggled and overcome a myriad of obstacles unimaginable in their native Switzerland. Through it all the community's “daily chant of the Divine Office continued to be a focus of prayer. Simplicity of lifestyle, a close communal bond, and industriousness prevailed.”

For the last 120 years the sisters of St. Gertrude have prayed the Divine Office daily. The sisters continue to live a communal and simple life. And, in response to the events of society and culture, they strive to develop ministries that meet the present needs.

In summing up Sr. Johanna's life, Sr. Lucille Nachtsheim said that Sr. Johanna and the Benedictine women “realized that they had adapted to circumstances beyond her most imaginative expectations and had become part of the pioneer legend of the Great Northwest.”

# Experience Monastic Rootedness – Come to a Retreat

## Sacred Meal, Liberating Memory

April 12 - 14, 2002

*Sr. Teresa Jackson & Kathy McFaul*

Explore how the central symbols of the Eucharist – body, blood, food and memory – have special meaning in women's experiences.

## Women's Work: Wonder & Wisdom

May 17 - 19, 2002

*Sr. Mary Kay Henry*

A retreat for women with a passion for deeper prayer and closer connections with the needs of the world. Input, discussion, quiet, sharing stories and prayer.

## Seeking Wholeness: A Cancer Retreat

July 19 - 24, 2002

*Sr. Carol Ann Wassmuth*

A five-day retreat designed to provide a supportive, restful environment for people whose lives have been affected by cancer. Through prayer, sharing and enjoyment of nature, individuals can find the space they need to deal with the important questions of life's purpose and direction and to experience the healing presence of God.

## Come To the Quiet

August 9 - 16, 2002

*Sr. Lillian Englert & Staff*

A silent individually directed retreat. Relax in God's presence, surrounded by natural beauty and supported by a praying community. There will be opportunities for optional faith sharing, creative expression through music, art, body prayer and ritual.



Visit us on the web: [www.StGertrudes.org](http://www.StGertrudes.org)

Email: [retreats@camasnet.com](mailto:retreats@camasnet.com)

[outreachretreats@hotmail.com](mailto:outreachretreats@hotmail.com)



IDAHO CORP. OF BENEDICTINE SISTERS

**Monastery of St. Gertrude**

HC 3 Box 121, Cottonwood, ID 83522-9408

## Look Inside ...

A century of caring and sharing with Sr. Radegunda Bischofberger

Who were the first monks?  
The answer might surprise you ...

A note from where it all began ... Sarnen, Switz.



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