

The Priory Knitters and Spinners

by Sister Monika Ellis, OSB

In spring 1998, Jim Christianson attended a workshop at The Priory Spirituality Center. During casual conversation he heard that someone at the Priory might be interested in spinning and in getting some fleece. Sister Monika and her own sister, Katie, were ecstatic to hear he had some fleece to give away.



And when they saw the fleece with its rich and varied natural colors they were thrilled. Immediately the two began to wash, card and spin the long, lustrous fibers of these Romney, Suffolk and Border Leicester sheep. They came up with the idea of designing a primitive tunic, possibly the type worn by common folk during the time of St. Hildegard of Bingen, as part of the Priory's celebration of Hildegard's 900th birthday. Patty Berke, a spinning/knitting friend, helped by teaching them how to card.

Before this project was completed for the October celebration Jim brought more fleece. The Sisters were delighted! And kept washing and carding (and washing and carding...) as they had time. By spring 1999 eighteen large black plastic bags full of fleece had accumulated in the Priory work shed and the fall 1999 delivery was received with something



less than glee. What were they going to do with all this fleece? How could they manage to wash and card it all? They were overwhelmed.

They went to *Dawn's Custom Carding* out in Roy, and had some of the fleece professionally washed and

carded into roving (spin-ready wool). Katie and Sister Monika were well satisfied with the roving but did not like paying so much for their "hobby" material. They set about looking for a pattern to make something to sell so they could pay for the washing and carding services.

In her pattern collection, Katie found a *Fiber Trends*[®] pattern for a knitted and felted sheep. Felting is a good process for beginning spinners because it is so forgiving of the lumps and bumps that first come off the spinning wheel. Katie and Sister Monika thought that making sheep from sheep was a good idea—and the rest is history.



The Priory Knitters and Spinners have spun, knit and felted more than seven hundred numbered and signed sheep that have made their way across the country, to Sweden, Germany, China and

into the hands of Lutheran and Catholic pastors and bishops. They bring a smile to the face of all who see them.

The Priory Knitters and Spinners use donated fleece from Jim Christianson and several other friends. Spinners spin the natural colored fleece and knitters knit up the sheep. Each toy sheep turns out quite unique even though the knitter uses the same exact pattern. The type of spin, the weight of the yarn, the properties of the particular fleece, and the art of the particular knitter contribute to how the sheep looks in the end. All the sheep are cute. When people see the black sheep they often



say, "I know who will get that one!" It takes 5 hours to spin the yarn for one sheep, and at least another 5 hours to knit, assemble and felt it. Income from the sale of sheep goes toward the support of the Benedictine community and its ministries.

In the spring of 2003 Sister Monika picked up needle-felting, a process of sculpting fleece with a barbed needle. Beginning with a single chickadee, she, Sister Mary and many others now craft a large



variety of birds that can be seen in the Pacific Northwest.

The sheep, birds and other wonderful creations are displayed in the **St. Placid Priory** lobby. The Priory is located at 500 College Street NE in Lacey, Washington, just north of the Martin Way/College Street intersection.



To see some photos of our creations and their creators online, to to www.stplacid.org and click on "The Priory Knitters and Spinners" at the bottom of the home page.

For information on how to obtain a creation spun and knitted by The Priory Knitters and Spinners; if you have fleece you would like to donate to St. Placid Priory; or if you are interested in joining the Knitters & Spinners, call Sister Monika at 360-438-2595 during the day, 360-438-1771 evenings, or write mellis@stplacid.org. We get together almost every week for fun and creativity!



Things Made by The Priory Knitters and Spinners Include:

Toy sheep:

homespun yarn
knit from *Fiber Trends*® pattern
felted and finished

Scarves, shawls and other garments such as:

socks
hats
mittens

Felted ornaments:

decorative eggs
birds
angels
santa figurines
tree ornaments
—Made with a combination of water-felting
and needle-felting processes



Prayer Shawls:

Not for sale, but as a ministry to anyone who needs comfort and prayer



St. Placid Priory
500 College St NE
Lacey, WA 98516
360-438-1771