I name what you already know. We are in the midst of a Trinity of global pandemics: COVID-19, economic devastation, and metastatic racism. Two of the three have directly taken lives. People are dying. Businesses have been shuttered and jobs drying up. Why? Where is God in the midst of all this horror?

In my twenties I heard a dynamic speaker use the image of a “divine backhoe” to describe that experience when God (however you understand the Divine Presence) seems to rip up the deeply embedded roots of everything we knew and understood about our lives. Relationships, false securities, our stereotypes and bigotries, our very idols go crashing down, wither up and dry. When God is not pleased with our behavior and we don’t listen to the Holy Spirit and change, that “divine backhoe” will move in and root out all that we covet that is so destructive to ourselves and others. Our own toxicity—our greed, our inequalities and abuse of the Earth—evoke an awareness of the “divine backhoe” uprooting and changing our course forever.

Might this be such a time of experiencing the “divine backhoe” on a global scale? Is God now speaking out against the devastation we have created and saying, “no more!”? Our complacency, our inaction, has been marginalizing and/or killing too many disadvantaged people. Our complacency has led to environmental destruction (which, in turn, affects primarily the poor and communities of color). Our complacency has continuously allowed for cycles of economic thievery (it is the 1% who again will be bailed out at the expense of the 99%). The dreams of young adults have been crushed. And we are leaving them with a disproportionate share of the debt burden.

And yet we are a people of hope.

In speaking of the prophets of the Old Testament/Tanakh, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel defined a prophet as one who speaks of God’s pain, anguish, and despair. Prophets condemned those who violated the Covenant, who crushed the powerless majority, pointed out to the people why they were suffering, and what must change for their pain to be relieved. Prophets condemned the behavior of the ruling class (the 1%) in defense of the “little people.” Prophets called the people back to faithfulness to the Covenant. Our prophets today bring us the same challenge.

Do we even remember what the Covenant is? That offer of relationship between humanity and the Divine Presence? Our part involves right relationship with one another and with creation. The Law/Torah expands upon The Ten Commandments to include exhortations on how we are to treat widows and orphans, the alien and foreigner in our midst, to how we will care for animals and the environment.

We have recently buried two such prophets: Elijah Cummings and John Lewis. Each remained hopeful and positive in the face of ugly bigotry and an economic and political system that has been rigged against the majority of Americans – including renewed efforts to take away voting rights. They worked, built coalitions, welcomed all – and remained hopeful. God raises up in every generation and in every neighborhood voices who name the pain and call out our complacency. They have called us back to the Covenant. Will we listen? Dare we listen? Does God now have our attention? How many Black, brown, and Indigenous lives must be destroyed before we will stop and listen to God’s prophets?

Through prayerful discernment we can learn who these prophets are and listen to their clarion call in our lives. Prophets usually evoke anger or fear or anxiety for those of us who have been complicit (knowingly or unknowingly). Martin Luther King was either loved or hated during his lifetime. Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta lived in danger every day of their lives, yet would not be silenced. Rachel Carson confronted pesticides in agricultural use before succumbing to cancer. Gustavo Gutierrez gave hope to the desperately poor in Central and South America – threatening the very privilege of the Roman Catholic Church. Sister Dorothy Stang was murdered for her defense of the Amazon and the tribal people who call that space home. Wangari Maathai was jailed for planting trees before she was elected to Parliament in Kenya. Will we listen?

And yet we are people of hope.

Many have named racism and white privilege (where we who are “white” benefit from a system that values us over the lives of others) as our nations’ original sin. They are correct. Our prophets have long tried to point this out and educate us,
but we haven’t been listening. We must begin by understanding what the term “racism” actually means. And that too many of our racist policies have been driven by greed. A disproportionate number of Black and Indigenous have died from our privilege of denial. Do you know the contemporary prophets Bryan Stevenson, or Julia Hill, or Ta-Nehisi Coates, or Ibrahim Kendi, or Michael Eric Dyson? Will we listen?

Pope Francis has said, “We pray for the hungry. We feed the hungry. That’s how prayer works.” In his little rule for beginners, Benedict said essentially the same thing. Benedict didn’t leave us with much theory or theology, he gave us actions: how to organize, how to pray, how to treat others, how to do leadership. He understood that it was through actions that we are transformed. In his “Tools for Good Works (RB 4),” Benedict was simple and straightforward: “Assist the poor. Clothe the naked. Visit the sick. Bury the dead. Come to the aid of those in trouble. Console the sorrowful.” Benedict accepted everyone who desired to seek God in the monastery, regardless of culture or social position or native language. He made time for the illiterate to learn to read. All with the ability were to lead prayers; and to be given positions of responsibility within the monastery—willingness and humility were his criteria. Benedictines have long cared for the environment. It is, after all, God’s Cathedral.

Humility was and is central to desert and monastic spirituality. RB 7 describes the progression, again in practical terms, of growth into humility, which is also growth into the contemplative stance. In contemplative humility we can sense the movement of the Holy Spirit in and around our lives as well as those around us. This is the stance that says “I have something to learn.” What might happen if we were to take seriously—and live literally—his “Tools of Good Works” and engage the “Twelve Steps of Humility”? The gift we’d receive is personal transformation that will stir up and disturb those around us.

Benedict of Nursia understood that listening was the most dangerous, most transforming thing we can do. It’s contemplative. Listening can be threatening to our own securities and disturb others. Might we seek a holy discontent?

A Franciscan Friar has been heard saying, “The Holy Spirit has a mission... and sometimes She has a church.” Let us follow the lead of the Holy Spirit.

_Sister Laura’s Scriptorium:_  
Books that Merit Attention

While there have been plentiful suggestions online (see especially padlet.com/nicolethelibrarian/nbasekqoazt 336co) and through our libraries for reading about racism and white privilege, I am listing a few of my own suggestions that I’ve used in the classroom at Saint Martin’s University. Each is written by a gifted writer.

**Between the World and Me** by Ta-Nehisi Coates, One World, 2015. A finalist for the National Book Award, this has become a classic. Coates, in the form of a letter to his son, recounts his own story of growing up black and male. What makes his story so compelling is that Coates learns and grows, his perspectives deepen through the human experiences of hope and pain and disillusion—and yet acknowledges to his son that his son is growing up in a different world and will have his own perspectives on matters regarding race. Coates is a MacArthur “Genius Grant” fellow. I especially recommend that you listen to this memoir, which the author reads, as his passion comes through his voice. My students found lots to discuss here.

**Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God** by Kelly Brown Douglas, Orbis Books, 2015. Douglas is an African American Episcopal priest and professor. My students grappled with and came to deeply appreciate what she had to say. Douglas was fired up by the murder of Trayvon Martin, which cut deep into the hearts of African American parents with beautiful black sons. As President Obama said, “Trayvon could have been my son.” She gives a succinct history of the crazy notion that “white” is better than “color,” an Anglo-Saxon myth of a superior race (where Hitler’s Aryan notion came from), analyzing how this myth grew into a monster. Then, grounded in her Christian faith, she explores the Jesus story in light of both the call to do justice and the hope that is ours, grounded in our sacred texts.

The recently retired Bishop Edward Braxton of Belleville, IL, one of ten African American prelates in the Roman Catholic Church, wrote a discerning pastoral on #Black Lives Matter. You may not agree with everything he says but he is a thoughtful person whose personal experience of bigotry mixed with his high level of education is evident in the document. Go to ilcatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/Racial-Divide-Revisited.pdf

**The Cross and the Lynching Tree** by James Cone, Orbis Books, 2013. James Cone was considered the “father of American Theology,” the first to write a truly American theology (not based on the European traditions of theology) and a contemporary of Gustavo Gutierrez (the father of Liberation Theology), Howard Thurman, and Martin Luther King. Maybe not the “favorite” on campus, but definitely deeply appreciated. Makes sense of the cross and the crucifixion of Jesus in a way my students hadn’t thought about before.

**Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption** by Bryan Stevenson, Random, 2015. My students, every semester, emphatically state that of all the books they read that semester, this is by far their...
favorite. And it’s already a classic. Yes, some of you saw the movie (well done but covers only one thread of Stevenson’s memoir). Stevenson, who has dedicated his life to ending the death penalty, won a US Supreme Court case that ended life in prison without possibility of parole for minor children, is a compelling storyteller. First “meet him” in his Ted Talk, then read his memoir, then go to eji.org (Equal Justice Initiative) to become more familiar with his work. Here you will learn about a memorial to victims of lynching – reminding us that we must face the truth of our shared history before racism has a chance to die — and a museum to the history of slavery, each in Montgomery, Alabama. Stevenson and his staff sought out every name of each victim of lynching around the U.S., acknowledging them each by name in the memorial. As peaceful protesters have chanted, “Say their name! Say their name!” The memorial has now grown to include American Indians/Indigenous who were also lynched. Then watch the documentary, True Justice: Bryan Stevenson’s Fight for Equality. Stevenson is another MacArthur “Genius Grant” fellow.

There are many novels, excellently conceived and executed, on the experience of being a person of color. Yet the most poignant novel I’ve read that paints the hellish cost of slavery and Jim Crow, written beautifully by a now-deceased African American writer is The Darkest Child by Delores Phillips, Soho Presss, 2018. Then there is The Last Thing You Surrender: a novel of World War II by Leonard Pitts, Jr, Agate Bolden, 2019. He is a Pulitzer Prize winner (writer and columnist).

How To Be An Anti-Racist by Ibram X. Kendi, One World, 2019. Kendi is a brilliant yet rare scholar who can explore and explain complex ideas in accessible terms without ‘speaking down’ to his reader. He challenges us to say, “I am not racist,” (even if that were true) is not enough. Silence kills (and has killed over the centuries). We must actively act against racism, which is one reason why young people are chanting, “say their name!” Kendi’s parents are evangelical Christians but he himself needed to disown his religious tradition because of the complicity of Christianity in defending slavery, Jim Crow, and the never-ending cycle of violence against persons of color throughout this country’s history. Kendi is also the author of Stamped From the Beginning, The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America, Bold Type Books, 2016, which won The National Book Award. Well-written; a great choice for you history buffs.

Now watch Naomi Klein’s documentary, This Changes Everything, based on the book by the same name (my students were stunned watching this). Watch a video or two on the global efforts of beekeepers to stop the death of bees and to help the hives thrive. Visit greenbeltmovement.org to learn about Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai and on that site watch the documentary on her life’s work: Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai (Marlboro Productions, 2008). Then read (or reread) Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato Si.

For a contemplative approach to our ongoing environmental devastation and the harm it does to our soul, read or listen to Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology by Douglas Christie, Oxford University Press, 2012. Christie is an exquisite writer and his use of sources is broad. He ties in early monastic and desert spirituality as an antidote to our current nightmare. Even though he addresses environmental concerns, his work easily applies to racism as well. Watch the Priory Spirituality Center’s ongoing list of programs and retreats on Zoom for a program based on this book to be scheduled in early 2021, and you’ll have an opportunity to discuss with others what you’ve learned and to raise your questions.

Email me at lswan@stplacid.org if I’m not keeping you busy enough! But keep LEARNING, a deeply-held Benedictine value.

From the Priory

Our lives at St. Placid have been different this spring and summer, as have most of yours, we suspect. We have not been involved in many external activities—we too have been “sheltering at home.” But our lives have not been entirely uneventful. From the Archivist’s Chronicles:

January 15 – On the Feast of St. Placid, our Novice Camille Wooden made her first Monastic Profession, becoming Sister Anna-Camille. Some of her friends came for the ritual and a celebration.

Are You Called?

Our Sister Julian Cleary will host a Zoom gathering for women who wish to talk about the possibility of vowed religious life. Coming soon! Watch stplacid.org for more information.
February 25 – On the Feast of St. Walburga, Postulants Mary Franklin and Tricia Burns entered the novitiate, a day they’d been waiting for, with friends in attendance.

March 10 – the novel Coronavirus, COVID-19, is sweeping through King and Snohomish counties—and is growing around the country as well.

March 11 – Archbishop of Seattle Paul Etienne suspended all public celebrations of Mass because of COVID-19.

March 12 – Monastic Council met. We are canceling larger programs at the Center for the time being. (We decided soon after to cancel all in-person retreats and programs, and offer instead programs via Zoom video conferencing.) The Timberland Library System announced limited in-and-out services to avoid the spread of COVID-19. Most employers are urging people to work from home; only a certain section of the population can do that.

March 16 – Father Gerard Kirsch celebrated his last Mass with us.

March 19 – Solemnity of Saint Joseph. We are now in virtual isolation: no one comes in and we rarely go out. One employee might have been exposed, so all our employees will not be returning to work until further notice. We are on our own for shopping, cooking, cleaning, and receptionist duty.

March 22 – We learned early this morning that Father Gerard Kirsch, OSB, our chaplain of 49 years had died in his sleep, probably of a heart attack.

April 12 – Easter Sunday. Christ is Risen! The community connected with Sister Angela Hoffman, ‘trapped’ in a studio basement apartment for what was to be her sabbatical doing research at Oregon State University—except that the laboratories she needed were closed. We did so via Zoom Video Conferencing.

June 28 – Birth of Benedicta Riepp and St. Placid Priory’s Foundation Day. Normally, this is the day for our Oblates to renew their Oblations, for Oblate Candidates to make their Oblation, and for us to accept new Oblate Candidates. Sister Raphaela Cady set up the camera in chapel so that Oblates and Candidates could take part in the ritual via Zoom. Mother Benedicta was the founder of the first community of Benedictine women in the United States.

Mother Benedicta wrote this when times were at their darkest. May we, too, take courage and trust in God’s Mercy and God’s Providence in this time of Pandemic.

OBLATES

Spring and summer were a busy time for the St. Placid Oblate community. Oblates continued to meet on the second Sunday of the month using Zoom. The last regular meeting of the year had forty-eight Oblates, Candidates and guests who Zoomed in from four different states and Canada. In May the annual business meeting was held, also via Zoom and planned for the next Oblate year, beginning in September. Meetings will continue on Zoom. The Oblate Leadership Team continues to do its work. Liz Langeland will be doing the facilitation of the Special Projects team. Thank you to Saima Scott who has facilitated this group for the last year and got it off to a great start. New oblate Andrea Jerabek will head the Outreach Team with Oblates Laura Tenisci and Don Cairns becoming facilitators for the Formation Team.

The four new Oblates we received on June 28 are:

Andrea Jerabek
Katherine Callahan
Laura Tenisci

Monch Kim
(not shown)

Our five new Oblate Candidates are:

Kathryn Rickert
Julie Ferraro
Sharon Pikula
Susan Johnson

In addition Marianne Mollet and Denise Anderson will be continuing their candidacy. We are so grateful to our Oblates, Candidates, and guests for the commitment, joy, and energy they bring to the Benedictine life.
On August 1, Sister Maureen O'Larey celebrated her 25th Jubilee with a renewal of her Monastic Promises at Evening Praise, a special dinner in her honor, and a festive gathering in the evening.

Father Gerard: Positively Hopeful

Our lives aren’t the same without Father Gerard. Neither are those of the banner-carrying and hungry folks who hung out on Martin Way and College—for Gerard never missed an opportunity to put some cash in their hands (a sort of communion) as he strode to our Priory to celebrate a different kind of Communion with us.

A monk of St Martin’s Abbey, Gerard was a brother to us, to the ill and hospitalized, to the homeless and the poor, to the disabled and the marginalized—to all. And those less fortunate were at the top of his ‘give to’ list. Gerard was a giver; no, not just money, but his time and presence too. And he was a great listener.

He was a person who strove not to judge others. In homily after homily, Gerard would remind us not to judge one another. He reminded us always of God’s mercy and compassion. That was the way Gerard lived: giving people the benefit of the doubt, extending forgiveness, offering compassion.

Father G. was a storyteller and a singer. We, along with those who joined us for Mass, had the unique opportunity to hear him break out in song, tell stories and even dance a step or two (maybe more of a sway or two). Gerard was skilled in delivering a sermon that could entertain as well as instruct and all in a brief few minutes!

Father Gerard celebrated his first Mass at St. Placid Priory (now the Northwestern Christian School) on February 25, 1971. Forty-nine years of serving the sisters of St Placid Priory! And as the Priory Chaplain, Gerard would often officiate at Monastic Professions and Jubilee celebrations. And, of course, at funeral Masses and burials of the Sisters.

As Benedictines, we make a monastic promise of stability, staying with our communities for life. Father Gerard served us at the Priory for almost his entire monastic life. What a gift to us and what an example of the real and deep meaning of stability to one another. Gerard taught us what perseverance meant by the way he lived his life, day after day.

Father Gerard could often be heard to say “Thank you.” No matter whether the statement made to him was a compliment or whether it was a criticism, Gerard naturally offered a thank you. He knew gratitude was part of hospitality and hospitality was of paramount importance to a monk. Gerard was inherently grateful.

Father Gerard was a man for our pandemic times—a model of Hope. Had he lived on during these coronavirus days, his attitude would have been one of being hope to others, giving encouragement, listening with compassion, finding ways to be grateful, and remaining steadfast in faithfulness to God and those around him.

—Sister Julian Cleary

From the Archives

One of my favorite group of artifacts in our archives is the books. We have a collection of the founding Sisters’ old missals, prayer books and copies of the Rule of Benedict. Each book looks thoroughly and lovingly used, some with inscriptions from loved ones or teachers. They have notations in the margins, holy cards used as bookmarks, newspaper clippings and scraps of paper with prayers and quotations. Some of them are written in German. Our oldest book is a copy of the Rule of Benedict from 1912, printed in Atchison, Kansas. When caring for these books I feel connected to the Sisters who owned and prayed with them—the same life of prayer and worship that continues today.

—Sister Anna-Camille Wooden
Monasterio Santa Escolastica – Puerto Rico

Earlier this year St. Placid Priory became aware of the critical needs of one of our Sister monasteries. St. Placid Priory is a member of the Federation of St. Benedict, an international congregation of ten Benedictine women’s monasteries. One of the monasteries, Monasterio Santa Escolastica, is in Humacao, Puerto Rico. Monasterio Santa Escolastica is a small, vibrant community of eight Sisters. Their main ministry is their school, Colegio San Benito. The Sisters and their school are in need of financial help.

Puerto Rico has been economically unstable for a long while. Its poverty rate is higher than the poorest US state. Puerto Rico struggles with chronically large debt, considerable unemployment and a high rate of emigration. Hurricanes Irma and Maria, earthquakes, and now Covid-19 have compounded Puerto Rico’s economic issues.

Puerto Rico’s economy affects the Sisters and their school. The enrollment of the school has not been stable as people leave the island in search of economic stability and return when things appear to be more stable, and then leave when they find continuing instability. Since the hurricanes, even more have left. Before the hurricanes, earthquakes, and Covid-19, Colegio San Benito served about 350 students, kindergarten through ninth grade, from poor and working class families. This year, with the addition of senior high grades, 328 students are enrolled. Nearly all of the families struggle to pay tuition. A few pay full tuition while the majority pay some or none. It is likely that they will continue to struggle to pay, as the unemployment rate has spiked to an estimated 40% due to Covid-19’s impact on the economy.

The diocese in which Monasterio Santa Escolastica is located is very poor. The Catholic Extension Society, which helps poor dioceses, reports: "The Diocese of Fajardo-Humacao in Puerto Rico is, by far, the poorest diocese in terms of assets and revenue, among Catholic Extension’s ninety mission dioceses." This impoverished diocese can not offer any financial assistance to the Sisters or to the school.

Sister Kerry O’Reilly, President of the Federation of St. Benedict, has noted: "In the last few years, the Sisters have placed their school over their own security, first by not receiving salaries over an extended time and then by using their savings to meet the financial needs of the school." The Sisters had counted on their pensions from the Church for current income. The Sisters' pensions were lost when, in January 2018, the Archdiocese of San Juan, which held the pensions, declared bankruptcy. As a result, the Sisters have little money left.

Our hope is that the school can continue to provide a Christian education to all who come and that the Sisters can be financially self-sufficient to live out their Benedictine monastic vocations while serving the people of Puerto Rico.

In February 2020, the Federation’s member monasteries committed to helping the Sisters with their living expenses for one year. At the same time, the Federation is diligently seeking additional funding sources. The Sisters are also working to boost the school's revenue so that they can once again be paid salaries from the school.

With our community’s blessing, I have been seeking grants to support the Sisters’ living expenses so that they may continue their monastic life of prayer and service and to provide scholarship funds at Colegio San Benito for the poorest families who can only pay a portion of the tuition or none at all.

We are seeking, too, the help of others. If you are interested in supporting the Sisters and their ministry to poor and working class families, please contact me, Sister Maureen, at 360.438.1771. —Sister Maureen O’Larey

Programs and Spiritual Direction Continue on Zoom

In March, the doors to the Spirituality Center were temporarily closed to guests and retreatants. The lockdown resulting from the Covid-19 outbreak gave us motivation to connect with our participants through technology. Meeting via Zoom Video Conferencing has been surprisingly engaging and has offered a way to expand our relationships—getting to know people from the England, Ireland, Scotland and Germany, as well as all over the United States, in addition to keeping up with those we already know. There are other good meeting platforms available, but we already knew how to use Zoom, so we chose it. Please go to stplacid.org/spirituality-center/weekend-programs to view and register for our upcoming Zoom programs.

Spiritual Direction is the practice of listening with another in a prayerful relationship, in order to more clearly hear and experience the movement of God in one’s life. We continue to do Spiritual Direction during this time using a variety of technologies including telephone. Listening with a spiritual director is an opportunity to see how God is tending us during this challenging time. If you would like to have a spiritual director, go to stplacid.org/spirituality-center/spiritual-direction, or call 360-438-2595. On our website you’ll find a list of our directors with their background.
Listening with the Spirit is a two-year formation program for spiritual directors. The 2021-23 class begins in September of 2021, but interviews start in February 2021. Details and the application are available at stplacid.org under Long Term Programs. For the safety of all during the pandemic, we’ll be using Zoom for this class.

“I could not have predicted the rich, multi-faceted journey of discovery we first-year trainees experienced in the LWS program this past year. Our biggest treasure was the grace we experienced in trusting ourselves, trusting each other, and especially trusting the Spirit to be present, to shed light, to hold us and our struggles with tenderness and love as we practiced Spiritual Direction with one another. Our leaders created an atmosphere of trust and intimacy from the get go, and we jumped in. This coming year we will be practicing our new art with generous people who are willing to work with newbies, and who will enrich us with their own stories, struggles and trust. And we will be reflecting in depth on our work and learnings with our Dr Pandiani and Sr Lucy Wynkoop. Come, Holy Spirit, come!” —Joan Henjun

Oasis, 2020-2021—An opportunity for two at-home retreats and six quiet afternoons from September to May, with presentations by several Sisters and Anna and Brian Peterson via Zoom. Registrations are now available at stplacid.org under Long Term Programs.

“For me Oasis has always been a breath of fresh air from the ordinary, and sometimes stifling, experiences of daily life, giving me a chance to stop and reflect on what is important in my life now. Being able to have spiritual direction every month helps me discern how the Spirit is working in me. Each year I enjoy reconnecting with the other participants, and I am always enriched by their sharing in group prayer and discussion. I am looking forward to this coming year of reading and reflecting on The soul’s slow ripening: 12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred.” —Karen Watts

Cinema Divina, 2020-2021 with Marilyn Freeman

Cinema Divina, the meditative film work and shared contemplative viewing practice of media artist, writer and St. Placid Oblate, Marilyn Freeman, begins a second season on October 4, 2020. Focusing on topics from everyday life, this program includes six sessions adapting Lectio Divina into a sacred film screening process with facilitated silence, reflections, writing and sharing. “These films have been transformative for me in the deep spiritual way that I have encountered other artists like Annie Dillard, Mary Oliver and bell hooks.” —Gabriel Molinaro, Pastor, Sanctuary Church Seattle.

Cinema Divina sessions are first Sundays: Oct 4, Nov 1 and Dec 6, 2020; Feb 7, Mar 7 and May 2, 2021, 2-4pm Pacific Time via Zoom. For details and to register see stplacid.org under Long Term Programs.

Modern Mystics—Carlos Herrera

The Modern Mystics Book Group is coming into our second year of existence! In the past year we have read three really inspiring books (The Universal Christ, Radical Optimism, and Prayer) and had some deep, insightful, spirit-filled discussions about those books. The book group will begin meeting again on September 8, second and fourth Tuesdays of each month, via Zoom. Please register at stplacid.org under Long Term Programs. You may also contact Carlos Herrera at cherrera@herrerainc.com if you have questions about Modern Mystics Book Group.

In This Time of Pandemic—

For This

We Give Thanks

“Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death… You are with me.” – Ps. 23

We give thanks for the lives of our friends and family who have died:

+Father Gerard Kirsch, OSB +Margaret Cady
+Marita Herrera +Johanna Weber
+Johanna Mitchell +Terry Christiansen
+Jeanne Martinsen +Clara Hamavand
+Donna Brown +Sheila Holtgrieve
+Mike Anderson

“Like the first women disciples who went to the tomb, we live surrounded by an atmosphere of sorrow and uncertainty that makes us ask, ‘Who will roll back the stone?’” Pope Francis asked. Continuing his reflection on the women disciples, the Pope said that despite their suffering and fear, they still went out to the tomb and did not allow themselves to be paralyzed by what was happening. While many of the apostles fled, the women carried their spices and oils to anoint Jesus’ body, much like the many men and women today who try to bring the ointment of co-responsibility to care for and not risk the lives of others.” Pope Francis said that the current pandemic also has highlighted the need to unite the entire human family and that the only way to conquer the coronavirus is through the antibodies of solidarity.” —from an editorial published April 17, 2020 by the Spanish magazine, Vida Nueva.

We all roll back the Stone. It could be said the Covid-19 virus is not unlike the stone barring the entrance to the tomb where Jesus was buried. At times it seems nearly impossible for it to be rolled away and brought to an end. Each of us, though, can ever so slightly roll back the virus through our safety precautions. At the Priory we have remained sheltering in place and have allowed minimal staff and workers into the monastery. When going out for limited and emergent purposes only, we have donned masks and gloves and kept 6 feet apart from others.

Continued on page 8...
Langeland, Peggy Hoffman and Larry Erickson are among those who have graciously given or delivered groceries to us. By engaging in safety precautions during this time, you too have been rolling back the stone of Covid-19.

Despite their sufferings and fears, health care workers and first responders persist in helping all of us these days. Whether it is a case of the coronavirus or some other health need, these professionals continue to care for us. We pray for them (and all of you) in our daily Liturgy of the Hours. We give thanks for their unselfish service.

We are not allowing ourselves to be paralyzed during these pandemic days. Sister Lucy at the Spirituality Center and Janice Ariza working from home, along with other program presenters have been creating Zoom programs and retreats that might have been “in person” in the past. They have had quite a response, telling us people are longing for connection and communion with one another. All the Sisters providing Spiritual Direction are busy too, as many people seek the Divine in these chaotic times. Volunteer Julie Ferraro has been helping, too, from home.

We carry our spices and oils. In addition to the ointment of our daily prayer, we are developing new spices and oils. Sister Monika has launched the Priory Arts Shop on the Priory website. This shop showcases many of her artistic creations including fiber arts, jewelry, and kumihimo braiding. She and other Sisters and Friends are making new things (like our classic little sheep) for this online shop. You can see what is offered at www.stplacid.org/shop.

Speaking of ointment and oils, we are using a little bit of cayenne pepper and other organic not-harmful potions to discourage our squirrels from eating from our bird feeders. Novice Mary Franklin has been busy ‘baffling’ the squirrels. Look at this clever contraption!

And notice our monastery Cat (she has many names, but a common one is Pretty Girl) closely eyeing the whole project! Or is she nodding off on the job?

Applying the Ointment of co-responsibility to care for and not risk the lives of others, we use masks and gloves when we leave the monastery and ask those who must enter the monastery to do so as well. We owe our employees and volunteers, our oblates, associates, affiliates and our local community a safe environment if and when they need to come to the monastery. Our Spirituality Center has been closed to prevent risk. Our co-responsibility has included our faithfulness to daily prayer for all the world. This year our annual retreat was held June 8-15, and in our silence we offered for our sick world prayers for global healing.

We live surrounded by Creation. We have been visited daily by a magnificent pileated woodpecker. The bird’s sheer size invites wonder. Desiring something different from forest trees for its meals, this ancient creature has learned to wrap itself around a suet feeder, meant for much smaller birds, on our patio just outside our dining room. Creation can bring us to contemplation and to gratitude.

Uniting the entire human and creature family we care for the needs of each other and our animal world too. Here’s a close-up of a young three point buck delighting in our rose bed.

From our window, he is almost hidden from view as he nonchalantly chews our precious rose beauties. The buck’s creative use of the very food he desires as a place to hide himself and blend right into the environment reminds us of the unity of all creation: human, animal, vegetable!

Pope Francis notes that the only way to conquer the coronavirus is through “the Antibodies of solidarity.” All of us are those needed antibodies! In solidarity, we are the antidote for this virus and all its vicious repercussions. The very act of protecting ourselves from this virus simultaneously protects others. As we love, forgive, offer thanks, and as we offer compassion to one another, we are healers of the consequences of this virus too. And, as we join our hearts and souls in prayer we transform our ailing world into a healing world.

–Sister Julian Cleary
We, the Benedictine Sisters of St. Placid Priory, a monastic community, cultivate a contemplative spirit that leads to hospitality and works of justice and peace. We witness Gospel values in building community. We are committed to nurturing spiritual growth in ourselves and others, collaborative leadership, stewardship of the environment, and taking risks in following God's call.

The Priory Spirituality Center

is an ecumenical Christian ministry that encourages people of all faiths to seek and discern the voice of God in their lives and in the world. We offer a peaceful and contemplative setting for personal reflection. We encourage and challenge people to know the presence of God in their lives through classes, workshops, retreats and individual spiritual direction.

The Priory Spirituality Center is a ministry of St. Placid Priory and reflects the Benedictine values of peace, hospitality, community, learning and prayerful discernment.

Attend a Program via Zoom!

Have you been missing retreats and programs at The Priory Spirituality Center? We’ve missed seeing you! You can attend a program or a retreat, though, in the comfort of your home. On our website, stplacid.org, we have an extensive list of upcoming programs available via Zoom Video Conferencing. Look for them under Spirituality Center – Programs or Retreats. There are instructions on how to get set up with the Zoom app on your computer, tablet or smartphone. The Zoom host (that’s us) does the heavy lifting once you’ve installed the app. To register, click on a program title, then click on Register Now.

Also on Zoom in the coming year are our long-term programs, such as our two-year spiritual director formation program, Listening with the Spirit. It begins in September 2021, but requires that you apply soon to be ready for an interview in February. See more information under Spirituality Center – Long-Term Programs on our website, stplacid.org. Oasis, another long-term program, continues via Zoom, too.

On May 1, 2020, our community went out to the flower garden to honor Mary, whose month is May, with a ritual. A while back, Sr. Julian’s parents donated to us a statue of Mary which had been in their family for some time. Jerry Haupt, a friend of ours who volunteers here, refurbished it and set it up in our garden.

The crown was made of red azaleas from our grounds, and Novice Mary Franklin did the honors as the community looked on. We are very grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Cleary for this beautiful gift.

Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us and our whole world!

Sister Deotila Takulyambwani, a Francisian Sister of Charity from Tanzania, has been living with us here at the Priory since last fall. She has been improving her English at Saint Martin’s University in their ESL Department. Sister has passed the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and has now accepted a scholarship from Saint Martin’s. She will be working toward a Master’s degree in Counseling, beginning this fall.

Sister Deotila has spent a lot of time studying, but she also takes part in our community life of work, prayer and recreation. This summer she has learned to play croquet.

Sister Sharon McDonald watches as Sister Deotila lines up her shot.

Sister Deotila Takulyambwani, FSC

Sister Deotila enjoyed drumming and singing when Sister Redemista, OSB came for a visit to our community last October.
Introducing
The Priory Arts Shop – Online

Sister Monika Ellis and the Priory Fiber Artists are now offering their fiber creations on our website at The Priory Arts Shop. A flock of knitted and felted sheep are available, as well as soft baby blankets, warm scarves and hats, decorative glass magnets, hand painted coffee and tea mugs, and kumihimo (braided) bracelets.

Beginning in the fall, our holiday Santas and other figures, which have so delighted people in the past at bazaars, will now be available in the Priory Arts Shop.

In addition, the Shop stocks the woodwork of Jerry Haupt, who has volunteered at the Priory for many years. Jerry’s raw materials come from our Peaceful Forest, where deer and other wildlife abound, and are shaped with skill into sturdy walking sticks, pendants and other items.

The Priory Arts Shop is a ministry of St. Placid Priory, and helps to support the Benedictine Sisters of Lacey and our other ministries. Please look for us online at stplacid.org/shop

Spirituality Center Staff
Janice Ariza – Center Coordinator
Lucy Wynkoop, OSB – Program Coordinator
Mary Giles Mailhot, OSB – Staff
Monika Ellis, OSB – Staff
Therese Gonneville, OSB – Staff
Julie Ferraro – Volunteer Staff

Directions
Coming South on I-5
Take Exit 109
Right turn onto Martin Way
Right at next light onto College St. NE
Second Right turn is our driveway

Coming North on I-5
Take Exit 109
Left turn onto Martin Way
Right at second light onto College St. NE
Second Right turn is our driveway

The Priory Store
The physical store, along with the monastery, is still closed due to the pandemic. We do take orders by email or telephone. Email thepriorystore@stplacid.org or call Sister Maureen at 360.438.1771.

The Priory Store welcomes as payment VISA and MasterCard. Sister Maureen will be happy to help you!