



Holy Wisdom Monastery

'Tis the season of traditions!

For many of us, this means Advent wreaths, Christmas trees, family recipes and holiday movies, just to name a few. When daylight grows short and we yearn for nostalgia and comfort, we take joy in the ritual of holiday traditions and the way they connect us across generations. Traditions mark this season as sacred, extraordinary and filled with meaning.

But outside of holidays and special occasions, few modern Americans would choose the word *tradition* to describe the way we live our everyday lives. Rather, we tend to acquire habits and routines that we pick up over time – consciously or subconsciously – and we piece together what works best for us through years of trial and error. We examine the beliefs and traditions we grew up with and often step away from what no longer serves us. This journey can be beautiful, painful, liberating and paralyzing all at the same time.

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”

– Simone Weil

But these days, the journey looks even more daunting, especially to young people. The internet, with all its advertisers and social media influencers, feeds us a never-ending menu of ways we might live (and what we might buy). Especially after a 2+ year pandemic pause on many typical traditions and routines, we might notice ourselves feeling lost and uprooted, unsure where to start.

2023 marks the 70th anniversary of the Benedictine Women of Madison at Holy Wisdom Monastery, and what we are calling A Year of Balance. We celebrate a rootedness to place, and not only the sisters' balanced model of living daily life, but also the balance that we continually discern – between tradition and progress, being and becoming.

The sisters at Holy Wisdom Monastery are known for their trailblazing leadership and willingness to break the mold. Over the 70 years, the sisters have fostered this community of communities in which queer love is celebrated and affirmed, where questions about faith are met with listening and ecumenical understanding, and where appreciating nature is no less a spiritual undertaking than reading scripture. They have restored a glacial lake and more than 130 acres of native habitat since 1996, built one of the greenest buildings in the country and became the first ecumenical Benedictine community of sisters in the US in 2006.

Yet when asked if they experienced any definitive moments or dramatic turning points in their history, Sister Joanne Kollasch shared, “No, not at all. We just got up each morning, prayed together and did our work. Each time we faced an issue or challenge, we made the best decision we could and trusted it would be enough. And the next day, we did that again. And the next day, again. And here we are.”

We often describe Holy Wisdom Monastery as being *rooted* in the Benedictine tradition. Philosopher and mystic Simone Weil defined rootedness as “real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain particular treasures of the past and certain particular expectations for the future.”

The story of Holy Wisdom Monastery carries this thread of tradition from past to future. For our sisters and oblates who live this tradition, each day is shaped by a simple, balanced rhythm of prayer, work, leisure and study – practical wisdom established in the 6th century AD by St. Benedict, and now taking shape here in Madison.

Although our rootedness does not promise what the future holds, it foretells of the continued need for the wisdom of our tradition and that we will be guided and served by a commitment to our time-honored values: the cultivation of prayer and spirituality, the practice of justice, providing hospitality and caring for the earth.

The nature of any tradition is that it is too large to be sustained alone. Certainly, the sisters and the monastery would not be where we are today without the support, talent, guidance and love of so many who have helped us over the years.

Your support serves our mission in 2023 and beyond, and helps us build on the good work we are doing:

- Inviting children to learn about ecology on our land with their classrooms and families
- Guiding clergy of diverse backgrounds through a year-long program for spiritual renewal (ECCSR)
- Updating our facilities with a net-zero carbon campus goal
- Stabilizing and restoring Wisdom Barn to complement the beauty of the land
- Increasing resources toward growing the sisters' community
- Offering transformational lectures and retreats with inspiring thinkers like John Philip Newell
- Continuing to grow the Sunday Assembly, Oblate, and Friends of Wisdom Prairie communities

Thank you for your continued partnership and may you enjoy the blessings of peace now and always.

Sincerely,



Charles P. McLimans, Chief Executive Officer



Mary David Walgenbach, OSB, Prioress