



# Retreat Handbook



**BENEDICTINE  
CENTER** OF ST. PAUL'S  
MONASTERY



# *Welcome.*

**B**reathe deeply. This is time for you to be present to yourself and to God. For this brief time let go of all that is demanding your attention and really listen. Of the many guests who step out of the busyness and come to St. Paul's Monastery for deep peace and quiet, none has a story quite like yours. This precious window of time will be unique to you. Be patient and gentle with yourself as it unfolds into what God desires for you.

This is a resource book offering you insights for your stay with these Sisters of St. Benedict. It need not be read straight through nor does it lay out a list of tasks you must accomplish. Glance through the table of contents. If something speaks to you, explore it a bit further. If not, that's okay. This is your time.

One of the first questions you might ask yourself is whether you would like to join the Monastic Community for prayer. You are welcome to pray and visit with them or keep your silence as you feel comfortable. The schedule for Morning, Midday, and Evening Prayer varies slightly around Eucharist, so check the reception desk or bulletin boards near the bedrooms for details. Find a place in the main chapel near one of the Sisters and they will be happy to help you find your place in the liturgical books. Listen first, then join in softly as the prayer has a slower rhythm than you may expect.

Know that you are a treasured guest in this house and that the Sisters are praying for you during your stay.

Blessings,  
*The Benedictine Center Staff*



# b | Moving Into Retreat

**N**oticing your own habits might cause you to smile and relax into the retreat experience. Each of the following are reasonable and common responses to being on retreat.

If you find yourself *wanting to do everything at once*, choose one book that may nourish you and stay with it during your retreat. Should more than a single section of this handbook appeal to you, commit to review only one part and take the rest home. (You can keep this resource if you like. Otherwise, leave it for the next guest).

If you find yourself thinking about stretching out for a bit of a nap, give in to sleep. It may be just what your body needs. While you may find resources or exercises in this handbook helpful, take them in small bites with room for rest.

If you find yourself longing to spend your time in nearly complete silence, follow that urge. The Sisters and other guests will respect your decision. Simply nod and smile when others greet you. During meals, you may choose a table close to the windows and face outside. That will let others know that you wish to dine alone.

If you find yourself not having a clue what to do first, unpack your bags and go for a walk. Go outside if you need room to wind down or take a tour of the Monastery (section D in this handbook) if the weather is poor. Without being rigid, see if you can explore something life-giving while on retreat.

*A few other questions* that may help you move into retreat. Consider them slowly and write a response in a journal if you so choose.

1. What has my relationship with God been like recently?
2. What has God been like in that relationship?
3. What have I been like in that relationship?
4. What has been my pattern for spending “quality time” with God?
5. If I sometimes feel resistance to spending time with God, how do I experience the resistance? Where might it be coming from?
6. How is God present in what pleases me and displeases me about my life?
7. How is my physical health? Psychological health? Spiritual health?
8. What am I doing to nourish my life?
9. How am I caring for myself regarding food, exercise, alcohol, sexuality, and relationships?
10. What do I desire from God during this retreat?





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Frequently Asked Questions



### *I'm here. Now what do I do?*

You are welcome as you like to join the Sisters for prayer, enjoy the art exhibits in the Cloister Walk and near the reception desk, spend some quiet time in the meditation chapel, browse the library on the first floor, walk the outdoor labyrinth, or stroll the grounds. Some guests request spiritual direction or simply enjoy the solitude of their bedroom.

### *What if I want to be silent?*

The Sisters and staff will respect your privacy if you choose to be silent. At meals, you may choose to sit near the windows facing outward. Should someone greet you, gently smile without speaking or briefly indicate you are on retreat and observing silence and continue on your way.

### *Is there someone to talk to?*

Spiritual directors are on staff with the Benedictine Center and are available by appointment. The cost for direction while one is on retreat is \$45.00 for each session. Contact the Benedictine Center desk if you are interested in setting up an appointment.

### *How do I pay my bill?*

An invoice for your stay is available at the reception desk. Checks, cash, and credit cards are accepted. Either give your payment to a staff person or place it in the locked deposit box with a note. You may pay anytime before you leave.



*Does the Community have a schedule for prayer, and can I participate?*

The schedule for Morning, Midday, and Evening Prayer varies slightly, so check the reception desk or bulletin boards near the bedrooms for details. All guests are welcome to pray with the Community. Find a place in the main chapel, to the right of the entry and near one of the Sisters, and they will be happy to help you find your place in the liturgical books. Listen first, then join in softly as the prayer has a slower rhythm than you may expect. Usually, Eucharist is celebrated on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday.

*Where's the coffee...and the bathroom?*

Coffee, tea and cold beverages are available in the dining room 24 hours per day. There is a cookie jar and snack serving counter in the hallway just before the entrance to the dining room with restrooms located to the right. Restrooms are also located behind the reception desk.

*How should I leave my room when I depart?*

As you prepare to leave, please remove used bed linens and remake your bed. Used towels and sheets should be placed in the laundry cart in the hallway or on the floor by your door in its absence. If you have checked out a key fob, return it to the reception desk. Return any library books. If you are borrowing a book, be sure to include your name and phone number on the check out card in the library.



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## Self-Guided Tour:

*Reflecting on the Rhythm of Work, Prayer, Learning, and Leisure*

Exploring the physical space of the monastery can help you understand the wisdom of the Benedictine rhythm of life. You will find along your walk the inspiration of art and the beauty of architecture, both an invitation to prayer. Pause for a time in each place and allow yourself some time to reflect on the questions that follow.

The tour begins in your bedroom. The early Christians in the desert had a saying, “Go to your cell (room) and your cell will teach you everything.” There is something about quiet and solitude that allows God to surface within a person what is most important. Some guests allow themselves the luxury of a nap, others curl up with a book or write in a journal. To the Benedictine mind, work is not about accomplishment or status. **WORK** is doing what each human being was created by God to do for the sake of the greater good. Here the retreat room is a place for your “work.” This is a time for you to practice the spiritual discipline, not of labor as you usually know it, but being attentive to the movement of God in you.

- If you are feeling tired, sleep. That may be exactly what your body needs.
- Take a few minutes of quiet in your rocking chair. As thoughts and responsibilities come into your mind, gently let them go. If they are truly important, they will still be there after your retreat.

When you are ready, make your way from the retreat area to the reception desk. Enter the chapel through the wooden doors on your left. If you have the good fortune of arriving in time for prayers or Eucharist (schedule available at the reception desk), enter the chapel a bit early, sit beside one of the Sisters, and she will help you follow along. If it is not time for prayer, be seated, take a deep breath, and listen—even if you are in the chapel alone. There is a silence rich with the presence of God. Responsibilities and inconveniences of the day tend to dull our senses until we miss that presence. Benedict was wise to call for the Community to pause for **PRAYER** at intervals throughout the day to allow our minds to be washed with the Scriptures. This Liturgy of the Hours, as it is called, is also known as “The Work of God.” Our part is to pause our activity long enough to notice that we are part of a greater rhythm—one not of our own making.

- Be seated and allow yourself a few minutes of silence. Close your eyes if it is helpful. Notice what this silence does to your body.
- Imagine the stream of prayer that has been flowing in this place for years—Sisters and guests—and see yourself invited into those waters. Consider the privilege of receiving the presence of Christ in the face of another while you pray.

If you continue past the chapel and the art gallery and watch to the right, you will come to the main dining room. Beverages are to the right. This is everyday living for the Sisters and guests of St. Paul’s Monastery. Much like the main chapel, the ordering of the place emphasizes relationship. Small tables allow people in conversation to see one another and hear well. Letting go of the day’s pressure to enjoy a meal and a cup of coffee with another person is a type of holy **LEISURE**. You may also gaze upon the icons or out the windows and notice the presence of God in art and creation.

- Take the time to enjoy your meal and taste what is right before you. If you have chosen to eat with others, practice listening closely to the conversation.
- Stroll outside, do something fun, or simply let your mind wander to practice making leisure a part of your rhythm.









Walk back past the chapel slowly, past the reception area and move toward the library. Head for the books. The library is a symbol of the Benedictine appreciation for **LEARNING** as part of the rhythm of life. The most formative learning, according to the Rule, comes from spending time with Scripture (*Lectio Divina*), but there is also a profound respect for the way that learning in general is a spiritual discipline. In a sense, one is exercising humility when listening to the wisdom of another through books, conversation, or other mediums. In the monastery, no one ever “arrives.” Formation is a lifelong process. The love of learning helps us to enjoy the ride.

- Walk slowly through the library and see if any titles catch your eye. Should you be interested in one book, sign it out with the card in the back, including your name and phone number. Keep it for up to two weeks.
- Enjoy one of the most beautiful and comfortable chairs in the house—next to the window. Reflect on what kinds of things you enjoy learning (for example, gardening, woodworking, art, poetry) and how you include those opportunities into your life.



e | Tips & Insights from Other Retreatants

*Don't rely on too many books.* Use a Bible and/or prayer book, a notebook, and one or maybe two others that seem most important for your reflection. More than that is a distraction.

*Try the ACTS approach to pray silently, out loud, or in a journal.*  
(adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication)

*Take one verse of Scripture* and walk inside or outside reflecting on that one verse.

*Look at the artwork* in the gallery, and reflect on the aspects of divinity and/or humanity that you find there.

*Write down, "I forgive \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_"* as you notice yourself resenting someone in your life. This does not minimize the offense, but could help you begin to let go of it.

*Write down, "I am grateful for..."*

*Ask a question.* The Sisters and the staff have lots of practice helping guests feel comfortable. Don't hesitate to ask for help with something.



f | Practices that Foster Reflection

## **Lectio Divina and the Art Exhibit: The Parable of the Prodigal Son (found in the Benedicta Riepp Room)**

### *With the Scriptures...*

1. Turn to Luke 15:11-32. Ask for a listening heart, that you may receive the Word of God in a personal way. (lectio, reading)
2. Read the passage slowly, even aloud, if you are in private and feel comfortable. Be aware of particular words, phrases or sentences that attract you in a special way. (meditatio, meditation)
3. Read the passage again and stay with part of the passage that attracts you. Speak with God about why you find the Word meaningful to you and how it relates to your life. (oratio, prayer)
4. Rest in the realization that God is present; allow yourself to feel God's love and let yourself bask in it. (contemplatio, contemplation)

### *With the Exhibit...*

When you have given yourself sufficient time with the passage, slowly browse the pieces in the permanent exhibit depicting the Prodigal Son located in the Benedicta Riepp Room (when a group is not meeting in the space). Linger with any pieces that catch your eye and spend extra time with those that speak most significantly to you.

- What was it about this artist's depiction of the Prodigal Son story that spoke to you and why?
- How does this piece help you explore where the parable intersects with your life and what you will take with you?

## **Participate in Morning/Midday/Evening Prayer and choose a Psalm or Scripture passage on which to meditate**

The Liturgy of the Hours (also called the Divine Office), grounds the rhythm of the day with prayer. Benedictines believe that God is always present and at work. Prayer therefore punctuates the day with opportunities to listen to what God is doing and join God in supplication for the world. The Sisters of St. Paul's Monastery pray morning, midday, and evening, plus Eucharist most Sundays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.

The Liturgy of the Hours draw heavily on the Scriptures and the Psalms, and are outlined in the books next to each chair. Go about five minutes before prayer to leave yourself time for getting settled and enjoying the quiet. Be seated next to one of the Sisters. She will be glad to help you find your place. Listen carefully for the rhythm of prayer; it may be slower than you expect. Then join in when you feel comfortable. As you pray together with the Sisters, listen for a passage of Scripture or a Psalm with which you would like to spend some more time.

*Taking a passage back to your room for Lectio Divina (Holy Reading)*

- Use the Bible in your room or your own to locate a passage from the Liturgy of the Hours. Read the passage once slowly (in silence or out loud), followed by silence. Then again.
- What words or phrases seem to catch your attention?
- Read the passage again slowly. Where is this passage intersecting with your life?
- Read the passage again slowly. What is God calling you to do or to be?
- Now rest in the quiet with God.

**Walk the Labyrinth and Write about the Experience**

As you leave the door of the monastery at the end of the guest wing, turn slightly to your right and you will soon see two stone benches on the right that mark the beginning of the labyrinth. (There is also a hand-held labyrinth in the meditation chapel if you prefer).

A four-year old named Asa said, "If you want to know God better, you should take a walk with God." The labyrinth is a tool of contemplative prayer that looks like a maze at first glance. Unlike mazes, however, the labyrinth offers one path which always leads to the center. There are no false turns or dead ends. Walking the path slowly and reflectively, although you may find yourself tempted to race in and back out, can help quiet the mind and body in a way that makes you more attentive to what God is doing.

The prayerful walk has these phases: preparation, entering, moving in, being in the center, moving out, and taking leave. Spend time in stillness and quiet with any of these should you feel so led. (For more information on the labyrinth, see the pamphlet in your room.)

*After walking the labyrinth, reflect on the following:*

- What did you experience within and around you as you walked? Any moments of resistance or openness? What might be significant about those experiences?
- If there were thoughts or feelings that arose about a particular memory, what do you sense God inviting you to do or to see?

### **Centering Prayer and the Meditation Chapel**

Make yourself comfortable in the meditation chapel just inside the chapel and to the right. Sit with good posture in a chair, on the floor with a pad/pillow, or using a prayer bench. Breathe deeply and allow the physical tension to fall away. Then gently follow these guidelines for Centering Prayer:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within. (some use Lord, Jesus, peace)
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts (body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections), return ever so gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period (20 minutes is suggested), remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

It is common and natural for thoughts to arise as part of the healing process. Return to the sacred word and avoid analyzing the experience or harboring expectations. The fruits of Centering Prayer may be experienced in daily life even more than during the prayer period.





Resources in the Monastery Library



## *St. Benedict*

*The Benedictine Handbook.*

Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press (2003).

*Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*

Joan Chittister, OSB, 1991. San Francisco: Harper, San Francisco.

*Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*

Esther De Waal, 2001 2nd ed. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.

## *Prayer*

*Open Mind, Open Heart*

Thomas Keating, 1992. Rockport, MA: Element, Inc.

*Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*

Michael Casey, 1996. Liguori, MO.

*Close to the Heart: A Practical Approach to Personal Prayer*

Margaret Silf, 1999. Chicago: Loyola Press.

## *Spiritual Direction*

*Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*

Henri J. M. Nouwen, 2006. New York: HarperOne.

## *Silence, Solitude, and the Spiritual Life*

*A Search for Solitude*

Thomas Merton, 2007. New York: HarperCollins.

*Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom*

John O'Donohue, 1997. New York: HarperCollins.

## *Vocational Call*

*The Stories We Live: Finding God's Calling in the World Around Us*

Kathleen Cahalan, 2017. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

*Let Your Life Speak*

Parker Palmer, 2000. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

*Enduring Ministry: Toward A Lifetime of Christian Leadership*

Samuel Rahberg, 2017. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.



h | Workshops & Retreats

## *Catalog*

Our *Listen* catalog is a six-month listing of retreats, workshops, and other spiritual growth opportunities at the Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery.

## *E-bulletin*

The Benedictine Center's *Listen* e-bulletin is a regular electronic bulletin highlighting news and events.

## *Website*

Visit [www.benedictinecenter.org](http://www.benedictinecenter.org) for more resources.

For subscriptions or other information, visit the Benedictine Center office, email [info@benedictinecenter.org](mailto:info@benedictinecenter.org), or call 651.777.7251.





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