The Sound of Silence

Check out from the busyness of daily life by checking into a spiritual retreat by ROSEMARY ZURLO-CUVA

The Mix/ESCAPES

Sometimes we need not so much a vacation as a retreat, a few days to rest and reconnect with our innermost selves, to reestablish our connection to spirit, however we interpret that notion. Just across Highway M from the north shore of Lake Mendota, Holy Wisdom Monastery, run by the Benedictine Women of Madison, offers the space and sustenance to make a healthy break from the noise and business of our daily lives.

On 138 acres of restored prairie, oak savannah and woods, with a glacial kettle lake and Indian mounds, the Benedictine Women have created a buffer from the pace of constantly juggling our jobs and families, our finances and, especially lately, our politics. The monastery building, green-built and newly dedicated in 2009, is a wunder of open space and light wood, windowed everywhere so that we never have to lose our sense of the world outdoors. The Retreat and Guest House provides simple, comfortable rooms with private baths, a bistroette and a communal breakfast room for those staying overnight.

There is a rhythm to monastic life, a series of repetitions that are in themselves peace-giving and restorative. Personal retreatants are invited (but not required) to participate to whatever extent they wish in the daily rituals of meditation and prayer at appointed hours throughout the day. Daily worship at Holy Wisdom is eucharistic and inclusive, a balance of silent meditation with music and readings from the Gospels and Psalms.

In between, while the sisters work, retreatants are at leisure to read or journal or sleep. Visit the monastery library to check the daily paper if you must—or better yet, walk the prairie and woods. Well-marked trails circle and cross the grounds, and the land abounds with plants and wildlife. On a dewy summer morning, watch cranes feed on the mown field west of the Guest House while a water monitor of one kind or another swims back and forth in the lake. In fall, look up through fallen oak leaves or through the woods to the golden prairie, sprinkled with purple asters. In winter, find fox and deer tracks to follow in the haul of a winter snow. The sisters say they've even seen a gray wolf.

Silence is a valuable commodity in modern life. It can be a sort of bliss.

In quiet contemplation, the sisters commit themselves to prayer and contemplation. Their lifestyle is introspective and marked by a deep commitment to the planning and execution of prayerful solitude. In this way, they can offer themselves as spiritual directors to those who seek it.

The sound of silence doesn't mean that the sisters are not committed to service and education. They are especially focused on offering a space for solitude and prayer for those in need. They are an inspiring example of how one can live a life of service and commitment in today's fast-paced world.

Quiet Time: Walking, sleeping, reading and praying are all ways to renew on a personal retreat at Holy Wisdom Monastery.