

# Matthew 25



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A journal on ministry and service to the margins in western Oregon

Catholic Charities

## Still a space for service and love

***Benedictines put beloved monastery in hands of Catholic Community Services***

BY BARBARA CURTIN MILES

MOUNT ANGEL -- Like many of Oregon's elders, the Benedictine Sisters are downsizing.

They are selling the four-story monastery that has housed generations of nuns since 1888 and have bequeathed most of their ministries to younger hands.

As of last month all the remaining sisters moved from their 30-acre campus to nearby spots in independent living, assisted living or nursing care.

Finances have played a part in the decision, but only a part.

"Vocations have dwindled, and to maintain this huge monastery for 16 sisters just isn't feasible," said Sister Dorothy Jean Beyer, the community's donor relations officer and retreat coordinator.

She grew up across the street from the imposing brick edifice on Mount Angel Highway. When she entered the novitiate in the 1960s, vocations were at their peak with about 140 sisters. Now the remaining sisters are in their 80s and 90s.

Their increasing medical needs will be better met at the nearby Providence Benedictine Nursing Center, Orchard House Assisted Living and Mount Angel Towers --



three of the local institutions that owe their start to the Benedictines.

Sister Dorothy Jean, along with pastoral administrator Sister Jane Hibbard and the Benedictine Sisters' board of trustees, are negotiating sale of the campus with Catholic Community Services Foundation. It's an arm of the Salem nonprofit that serves about 5,000 people in 10 counties.

Donors have already contributed a significant down payment, said Josh Graves, CEO of Catholic Community Services. The agreement could close by August, he said.

"Catholic Community Services is dedicated to serving seniors and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities," he said. "The property is an amazing place to continue this work."

Catholic Community Services hopes to develop the monastery building into a total of 30 units for farm workers -- a longtime ministry of the nuns -- and families experiencing homelessness.

The Benedictine Sisters will no longer own the property, but this

doesn't mean the end of their monastic community.

The sisters have rented space at Orchard House for prayer and cherished activities such as sewing and solving puzzles. They'll continue to walk the tree-lined campus and visit the tranquil Saint Scholastica garden. They'll continue to offer talks and retreats. The monastery chapel, which was rebuilt after a 1993 earthquake, will still host jubilees and funerals.

Resilience has been part of the sisters' lives ever since the 1880s, when a small band from Switzerland settled above an abandoned Gervais saloon. Their descendants have weathered financial woes, two world wars and more.

Sister Dorothy Jean finds inspiration in Joshua 1:9:

"Do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

-- Barbara Curtin Miles, a retired journalist, serves on the board of directors for Catholic Charities of Oregon.



Baby clothing and training potties rest on a table during a June training on diapers hosted by Catholic Charities of Oregon.

## The ons and offs of cloth diapers

When young families go shopping, Catholic Charities of Oregon wants to make sure they don't need to choose between food and diapers.

That's why the agency is grateful for the support of PDX Diaper Bank, which provides boxes of free disposable diapers for families being helped by Catholic Charities' Refugee & Family Services.

Inflation has left the supply of affordable diapers, and especially the moist cleanup towelettes, well, wiped out. The cost of diapers and wipes increased 11% over the past two years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To supplement the supply of disposable diapers, PDX Diaper Bank and Catholic Charities team up now and then to hold classes that teach parents how to use cloth diapers – a facet of parenthood past that is making a comeback. Not only are cloth diapers better for the environment, but they are ultimately cheaper and reusable.

Hilda Guerrero, a family services case manager with Catholic Charities, said donations of wipes would be a big help. Also in low supply are diapers in sizes 4, 5 and 6. Donations can be brought to Catholic Charities, 2740 SE Powell Blvd. in Portland.

# More affordable housing set

PORTLAND – A coalition of private and public developers met June 12 to mark the start of construction of Glisan Landing, 137 units of affordable housing in Northeast Portland.

Along with housing, there will be on-site amenities, resident services and employment opportunities. Completion is set for early 2025.

"It is a thrill to be a part of this project because it embodies Catholic teaching which says housing is not a commodity but a human right," said Natalie Wood, executive director of Catholic Charities of Oregon, which is part owner and service provider.



"That's right!" someone in the crowd called out.

"Here people will have a chance to thrive, enjoying a space of their own but also having a chance to form community with others," Wood continued. "The building's



Catholic Charities will be part owner and service provider at Glisan Landing in Northeast Portland.

design will help make that happen."

Wood noted the project includes a room for health care, job training and nearby food stores.

"In short, Glisan Landing promotes human dignity," she said.

Wood concluded that the project leaves her feeling hopeful.

"Much has been made of Portland's crisis of homelessness," she said. "Glisan Landing is a smart and sensible response that comes at a time when some people are ready to give up on the problem. But Catholic Charities will not give up, and I can tell from your faces that you won't give up either."

## LAW STUDENTS HELP WHILE LEARNING

It's a win-win. And we're pretty sure that's a legal term.

Students from local law schools who volunteer with Catholic Charities of Oregon Immigration Legal Services assist immigrants, asylees, refugees and survivors of serious crimes, all while learning from the agency's immigration lawyers. Opportunities are available both during the school year and the summer.



"It's been a great partnership between us and the law schools," says Andreea Szabo, a Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services senior attorney.

Students may be asked to re-

search country conditions in nations from which asylum-seekers have escaped. Knowing possible threats and perils is vital for building a case. Law students may also assist attorneys with preparing immigration applications that offer a path to permanent residence for survivors of serious crimes.

Have a story about Catholics reaching out to those on the margins? Contact Ed Langlois, Catholic Charities communications director, [elanglois@ccoregion.org](mailto:elanglois@ccoregion.org) or 503.935.6187.



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