



MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER

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Volume 36, No. 10

October, 2019

IT'S A HABIT

By Sister Mary Beverly, HSM

What is a habit? I still have a Webster's dictionary on my desk. Consulting this time-honored resource for *habit*, the first definition is "a disposition or involuntary tendency to act constantly in a certain manner usually acquired by frequent repetition." A habit is something I do regularly, like taking a daily walk.



The fourth definition is "a costume indicating rank, membership in a religious order, or a special activity, as a *riding habit* or a *nun's habit*." So a habit is what I usually wear, my normal clothing. I am not a nun,

but, as a Hermit Sister, I do wear a religious habit.

By definition, a *religious habit* is not clothing I can buy in a women's clothing shop. There is something distinctive about religious clothing as opposed to secular clothing. How then do Sisters get religious habits? By the traditional skill of sewing. In my case, I have to sew the dresses and veils which I wear. Fortunately, my mother taught me to sew from the time I was a child and then, later in the convent as a teenager, I learned dress-making.

These 35 years at Marymount Hermitage, as Hermit Sisters of Mary in the Diocese of Boise, I have sewn habits for both Sister Rebecca Mary and myself. My mother died at age



60, before we were living in Mesa, Idaho. The only personal possession I have is her sewing machine. This Singer sewing machine was given by my Dad as an engagement gift to my Mom. You will see in the photos that it is detailed with gold stenciling, showing that these old Singer sewing machines were not only functional and reliable, but beautiful. I love mine!



How often do I make dresses for myself? On an average, I make two dresses every two years. When I am sewing, the job takes up two rooms in my house, so, though I love sewing, I try to make this inconvenient mess as infrequently as possible. If I am going to make one dress, I might as well make two. Each dress takes a week to make, from start to finish, from cutting out the pattern pieces to the final hand sewing.

Do I make my own pattern pieces? No. In the convent, everything was homemade for the pre-Vatican II style, long, wool habits that we wore. Fortunately for me, the style Sister Rebecca Mary and I chose for our hermit habit is a princess style dress. I can find this classic dress style pattern in any fabric store. Because of the change in the fabric manufacturing in our country, or lack thereof, finding suitable



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dress material is very difficult now. I always ask Our Lady to help me with my sewing work and she it is who helps me find all that I need when there are cultural, economic changes in world commerce.



When Sister Rebecca Mary and I first came to Idaho and were working at Nazareth Retreat Center in Boise, we were still wearing the habits from our former SSMO community. We had decided on the dress and matching denim pants, but I still could not visualize what we would do about a veil.

One day, a Mercy Sister came to Nazareth to make a retreat. When I saw her veil, I knew I had found the answer to our question! I asked her if she made her own veil, and she proudly said, "Yes." I asked, "Would you be able to give me your pattern pieces, and allow us to make our own veils like yours?" She was very pleased to accommodate our request. To this day, I still have and use her pattern papers.

You have probably seen us wearing our hermit habits, but for those of you who have not, the dresses and jeans are dark blue denim fabric (which fade with years of washing). The veils are a light blue cotton fabric with a headband that is quilted. The veil, dress, and jeans are durable and machine washable. Our habit is suitable for and actually inspired by the high desert ranch land where we live. Denim fabric is eminently American for frontier, working wear, but the style of dress/tunic over pants is actually an ancient Asian design. Along the trade route from China to Europe, a mummy was recently dug up when a new



road was being constructed. The woman was wearing basically the same clothing we are and the mummy was 3,000 years old. Feminine, but functional! Even today, in Asian countries in the rural areas, women are wearing this same style. That's what I call classic women's clothing.

Our hermit habit is simple, practical and modest. In religious terms, our habit is a symbol of our dedication to God. It is a sign of our consecration, of being in the world, but not of the world. In many cultures, a veil, especially for the wedding ceremony, is the distinctive feature for the bride. As a vowed Hermit Sister, the veil proclaims that I am a bride of Christ, and a public witness to the Church, who is THE Bride of Christ. It is a privilege to wear a religious habit and, in this very unchurched part of the country, I know that wherever I go, I AM the Catholic Church for many people. What they think of me is what they will think of the true Church. So wearing a religious habit is also an awesome, public responsibility. When a young woman becomes a novice and receives her veil for the first time, the Bishop blesses it and her. Ever after, the veil and entire habit is blessed, that her life might be holy and worthy of Christ and the Church.

COMMUNITY NEWS

By Sister Mary Beverly, HSM

VISITORS: On Sunday, September 8, some members of the Verbum Spei Fraternity visited me and Marymount Hermitage for the first time. At the invitation of Bishop Peter Christensen, Bishop of Boise, this community is being newly established in Idaho as of this spring. It is an international community of priests and brothers and this will be an English-speaking, formation house for them in the USA. Seen from L to R are Brother Christopher who is being received as of 10/1; Joe from MN, who is discerning joining the Fraternity; Father Dominic, the local superior; and Brother Jonathan, who is studying to be a priest. Please pray for all young people discerning vocations.



The MARYMOUNT HERMITAGE NEWSLETTER is published by Marymount Hermitage, Inc., a non-profit, tax-exempt corporation in the State of Idaho. The Hermit Sisters of Mary are a canonically approved, Catholic community of women hermits, following the Rule of St. Benedict. The newsletter is published each month by the 15th on our website only. The purpose of the newsletter is to share the spirituality and material progress of Marymount Hermitage. Please pray that we may be faithful to our way of life in prayer and penance, solitude and silence for the sake of the Church and the world. Donations are sincerely appreciated and are tax-deductible. Thank you in advance to those who have remembered Marymount Hermitage in their wills. God bless you!