

Heart ♥ to ♥ Heart



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For the Beauty of Montana and the Legacy of St. Angela's Spirit, We Give You Thanks, O God!

The Montana Ursuline Experience Program began as a historical educational offering, led and directed initially by Sr. Irene Mahoney, OSU, and then developed further by Sr. Rosemary Meiman, OSU. Sr. Rosemary had worked with Sr. Irene and had experienced history through Sr. Irene's writings on the history of Montana. Following in Sr Irene's footsteps, Sr. Rosemary led the summer Montana Ursuline Experience at the Ursuline Centre in Great Falls, MT for a number of years. When she suffered a stroke and died during the summer of 2019, the program stopped. Then Covid followed.

In 2023, Thomas Trunkle, Ursuline Centre Director, contacted Sr. Lois Castillon, OSU, in Dallas, and they began brainstorming about future possible offerings and a pilot week in Montana for a small number of faculty and staff from Ursuline Academy of Dallas. The pilot program, which took place in July 2024, evolved to include not only the invaluable lessons and inspiring stories of the early Ursuline Sisters in Montana, but also a retreat component to enhance the mind, body, and spirit during the weeklong experience. The path of the participants retraced the steps of the courageous Montana Ursulines and, along the way, took advantage of Montana's wide-open spaces, solitude, and mountain air to reorient themselves and replenish their spirits. In this issue of Heart to Heart, participants share their reflections on their 2024 Montana Ursuline Experience.



"This was my second time on this trip, and I enjoyed it even more than the previous one. In addition to the comradery with everyone, staying at the Ursuline Centre and seeing several of the Montana missions, the new trip to Lincoln and spending the day/night at the retreat center was a great experience. This provided the opportunity to hike, explore nature, engage in reflection and see the Continental Divide. The entire trip was an awesome experience."

—Jim Koehler
Ursuline Academy Chief Financial Officer

"The Montana trip was a great time meeting wonderful people. It was a good mix of learning about the Ursuline heritage/history in the area as well as the terrain/natural features of Montana. I felt well taken care of, from the transportation to the food/meals at both the Retreat Center and the Ursuline Centre, to the guest speakers and activities. It was a trip I will remember always."

—Brenda Rasco
Ursuline Academy Administrative Assistant
for Mission/Campus Ministry

"I enjoyed staying at the Cane Ridge Retreat Center and getting to know my retreat partners better. It was very relaxing and I enjoyed the pace of the retreat. We were busy but we had time to reflect. I particularly enjoyed the drives to see the Montana country and the mission sites."

—Leah Schlieff-Freese
Ursuline Academy Art/Ceramics Teacher

"This beautiful week in Montana, my eighth one in the last 12 years, was a peak experience for me. Working with Thomas Trunkle, director of Ursuline Centre, was filled with his flexibility and generosity and love of our legacy. My favorite times included our being at the Cane Retreat Center in Lincoln, taking turns in preparing our meals and sharing together, seeing the beauty of Montana's land, and appreciating Don Fish's sharing of the indigenous spirituality of his Blackfeet Tribe. I loved it all!"

—Lois Castillon, OSU
Ursuline Academy Director
of Misson & Heritage



"I really loved our trip to Montana. Going to the Buffalo Jump at the Native American reserve was such a unique experience; learning about the history and the use of sage in native spirituality was inspirational. A favorite of mine was our hike at Rogers Pass; the 9,000ft elevation and amazing sites were unlike anything I've ever seen. My favorite thing overall was being with my Ursuline family. Kudos to Jim for game night, and Sr. Lois for the fellowship and making this trip possible. I felt very special being a part of this trip."

—Sean Stewart
Ursuline Academy Director of Security

"The Ursuline Experience in Montana is an amazing opportunity to experience a piece of the Ursuline early mission to bring Native Americans into our Faith. It's one thing to read about the challenges the Sisters overcame, but quite another to walk in their footsteps, from the St. Peter's Mission on the plains and foothills of the Rocky Mountains to St. Ignatius in the shadow of the beautiful Mission Mountains. I personally enjoy sharing the many hiking opportunities that showcase and experience God's natural beauty in the plains, the mountains and the forests. Our stay at the cabin in Lincoln is accessible to moderate to easy hikes of sections of the Continental Divide Trail that affords incredible views into Canada as well as the Scape Goat range of the Rocky Mountains. Besides the inspiration of the early Ursulines, the retreat center offers a much needed get-away from day to day demands of our time and allows for a mix of fellowship and contemplation, growth and relaxation. I look forward to the next opportunity to share the Ursuline Experience in Montana!"

—Mary Somerfeld
Ursuline Centre Board Member, Great Falls, MT



We give thanks in prayer and laughter...in Kinship with Creation

(From *Spirit Wheel: Meditations from an Indigenous Elder*

by Steven Charleston of the Choctaw Nation)

Sometimes I laugh when I pray. I hope you do too.
So often prayer is such a serious business
With so many deep needs and heartfelt petitions
But there are those moments, those rare and happy times
When the **thanksgivings** start to flow
Like a mountain stream rushing over rocks Life running through sunlight.
And I cannot help but smile
Smile at the beauty of it all, smile at grace so abundant.
May the Spirit give you reason to laugh today.
May your prayers turn to delight.
May your thanks be said with a smile.
May your life run through sunlight
Prayer and laughter the same.



Montana Ursuline Experience participants
from Ursuline Academy of Dallas and Ursuline Centre in Great Falls, MT

