



THE WEST VIRGINIA INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUALITY

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NEWS FROM WVIS

2025 #4

Message from our Executive Director

Sr. Cheryl Clemons, OSU, PhD

Dear friends of WVIS,

As autumn continues to unfold around us, we here at WVIS area are already looking forward to next year. After input from WVIS faculty and staff, the Board of Directors authorized the choice of new 2026 theme for WVIS: RENEWAL, a theme that captures our current reality.

Now two years past our 25th Anniversary celebrations and one year after the tragic death of our beloved Sr. Carole Riley, WVIS has been in a time of transition. RENEWAL speaks to our connections and rootedness in what has gone before, the strong foundations upon which all our work at WVIS continues to develop. But RENEWAL also captures some of the prophet Isaiah's promise: "Behold, I am doing something new!"

In case you may have missed some of the "new" over these past months, here's a partial list: 1) the "team approach" to WVIS leadership, whose privilege and responsibilities are now shared between Sally Orcutt and me as we work together to guide our Institute; 2) a new spirituality program called "Everyday Sacred" designed to assist Christian disciples grow in their faith life; 3) a full review and updating of WVIS training content for both the Initial Spiritual Direction Training and the Advanced 19th Annotation Training Programs; 4) a new St. Thérèse Couderc Fall Fundraiser; and 5) an assessment of our physical 1601 East Virginia St. home, followed by some helpful changes/repairs both inside and out, thanks to some very generous volunteers (especially Debbie Wright, Megan Harris, Paul Orcutt, and Pat Colton.)

May RENEWAL — rootedness in the blessings of the past and the excitement of building something new together — serve as a beacon to light our way throughout 2026!

May God bless your days with the graces you most need!

Sr. Cheryl Clemons, OSU, PhD, Executive Director



Thank you. We want to express our gratitude to everyone who made a donation to the St. Thérèse Couderc Fall Feast Day Fundraiser. WVIS raised over \$10K - your generosity is greatly appreciated.

Message from our Board President

Rev. David S. Lake

Pastor, First United Methodist Church
Waynesburg, PA
dslake2000@gmail.com



Hello WVIS Community,

I have been privileged to have back-to-back weekends with weddings. I am always so hopeful when I work with couples and they share their stories of meeting and falling in love. It is wonderful to see their growth as a couple over the weeks as we meet and discuss different life topics.

At the most recent wedding, I loved how the couple took ownership of their vows. They said to the other: "On this day I affirm the relationship we have enjoyed. I will be yours in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health, in failure and in triumph. Together, we will dream and live as one while respecting one another; we will stumble and restore each other; we will share all things. I shall cherish, comfort, and encourage you, be open with you and stay with you as long as I shall live."

It has occurred to me that Almighty God says similar words to each of us everyday! May we hear God's words of hope, wholeness, healing and love.

May the Peace of Christ be with you,

Peace,

Rev. David S. Lake

We're going digital in 2026!

Beginning in January 2026, the WVIS newsletter will be shared via email with a link to print out the document for those who prefer to read a paper copy.

Why this decision? In our last issue, we asked for feedback about whether to keep printing or go digital and received only a few emails saying "digital is fine."

However, if receiving the newsletter via email does not work for you, please let us know exec.director@wvis.org and we can mail you a paper copy.

WVIS Wish List Items

WVIS receives many gifts on our "needs" list each month. Thank you in advance for your generosity. We currently have needs for:

- Copy paper and/or decorative paper for retreat welcome packets
- Free & Clear Laundry detergent, Dryer Sheets, and/or Laundry Sanitizer
- Pods for the dishwasher
- Paper Towels, Bathroom Tissue, Kleenex
- Gift cards to Walmart, Aldi, Kroger, and/or Sam's Club

Most of these items are available on Amazon and can be shipped directly to WVIS.

Celebrate The Spirit and a Fall Fling

Celebrate the Spirit is a WVIS Spiritual Direction program that partners with the Addiction Healing Center and St. Francis Hospital to help recovering people understand the importance of a strong spiritual grounding in addiction recovery.

For five years, *Celebrate the Spirit* has been involved in weekly meetings with Recovery Center patients to encourage active connection with the 12-step community in and around the Charleston, WV area.

Three times a year a free luncheon and family-friendly event is offered to those who are on a journey of recovery or affected by addictions of relatives or friends. It is central to the program for addicts to share stories within a safe setting. It is important for the program to be family-oriented since addiction is a family disease. The Recovery Center patients and community members are encouraged to attend. This fall twenty-nine people took the opportunity to make new friends and start healthy long-term relationships.

Reviewers gave high marks for the program praising the welcoming atmosphere, inspiring speakers, safe sharing, and delicious food. WVIS is grateful for the leadership of Sister Molly, Bob, Joe and help from Bridget and Rose Marie in proving this much-needed community service.



Bob Sylvester is a WVIS Associate Spiritual Director and a member of the Celebrate the Spirit Core Team



A quick reflection from Maureen Gerecke on: *Everyday Sacred: Engaging Spirituality through Scripture and the Christian Tradition*

It has been such a pleasure to participate in Sister Cheryl's *Everyday Sacred* Program. We have only had two out of the eight, all-day Saturday sessions, but she has already given me so many things to contemplate from a very thorough Introduction to Spirituality in September; and in October she covered Prayer: Theory, History and Practice.

I find myself reading over the slides and handouts several times during the month because it is packed with so much good stuff! Every time I read through it, I find something new that I didn't notice before. I can hardly wait until the next class.

I thought that a 6-hour class would be overwhelming, particularly on zoom, but the class is very well paced between her presentations, breaks, and times to share with partners or small groups. The large group practices of Lectio Divina, prayer and music are very meaningful and help set the sacred container for all of it to be held in such a safe space.

She has shared spectacular resources from wisdom sources throughout the ages. I find the material challenging and inspiring with the rich excerpts. She shares so many highly respected authors. Not only that, she marries them with beautiful visual aids, so all my senses are engaged. The information was very educational for me, but more importantly, they are meaningful because she helps us see how it applies to our lives. It all feels very nourishing. The reflection questions each month are helping me to reflect on my own development, spiritual growth, and relationship with God. I am so grateful for this opportunity!

Maureen Gerecke is a retired educator, counselor, and lifelong learner. She lives with her husband in Grass Valley, CA



Leave a legacy that will help others by contributing to WVIS through The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation. You can donate online by going to The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation (tgkvf.org) and donate to the WVIS Endowment Fund or mail your donation to WVIS Fund, c/o The Greater Kanawha Valley Foundation, P.O. Box 3041, Charleston WV 25331. Contact Michelle Foster, at 304-346-3634 for more information.

WVIS Sets Strategic Priorities for the Future

In her article this month, Sr. Cheryl speaks of *Renewal* as "our connections and rootedness in what has gone before, the strong foundations upon which all our work at WVIS continues to develop" as well as capturing some of the prophet Isaiah's promise, "Behold, I am doing something new!"

During our recent strategic planning weekend that included faculty, board members, and spiritual directors, we came together to do just that - honor the foundation and envision the next chapter. The discussions, grounded in prayer, community, and honest assessment surfaced several overarching priorities that will guide WVIS as we go forward.

Clarifying and Reaffirming WVIS's Core Identity

Everything begins with a renewed sense of "who we are and who we serve." Questions surfaced around language and scope: Does WVIS desire to "primarily" be a regional presence or an organization with national and global reach? This was a rich conversation and those participating agreed that at this time, WVIS desires to focus on having a regional presence including areas surrounding West Virginia that may be underserved. The question was also raised, "How can WVIS' messaging remain inclusive across denominations while preserving its Catholic Ignatian foundation?" It was agreed that by grounding every initiative in a clear identity, WVIS can ensure that growth and programming remain focused, cohesive, and faithful to its spiritual roots.

Expanding Awareness and Ecumenical Reach

A second priority centered on increasing visibility and participation in WVIS's formation programs, retreats, and community offerings. It was agreed that it is important for us to broaden the "external" understanding of what spiritual direction "is" through storytelling and education. This is particularly true across different generational audiences and denominations. Additionally, it was agreed that while maintaining the grace of the in-person retreat experience, WVIS will continue to leverage Zoom to reach participants beyond West Virginia.

Training and supporting (supervising) spiritual directors is at the core of WVIS' mission and expanding awareness and accessibility is vital for attracting new trainees, deepening ecumenical

credibility, and ensuring the next generation can encounter the transformative work of spiritual direction.

Building Sustainable Operational Capacity

Sustainability emerged as an essential foundation for WVIS's mission. This included the need to evaluate the human resources that are key to the operation of WVIS. This included:

- Staff and faculty workload – Are there additional "remote" volunteers out there that can be brought into the WVIS fold to serve the Institute?
- Board development – Are there individuals associated with WVIS that might be interested in serving on the board of directors that would bring a renewal to the board and specific (and desired) skill sets?

Exploring sustainability and operational capacity will invite others into our community while supporting our existing team.

If you are interested in learning more about possible remote volunteer opportunities or are interested in potentially serving on our board of directors, please email me at sally@sayyes2yourlife.org.



Sally Orcutt, O.P. M.P.A. is the WVIS Director of Operations and an Associate Spiritual Director, Cumming, GA

Are you interested in learning more about spiritual direction / prayer guidance? WVIS has certified spiritual directors available to meet with you.

Want to learn more about making a silent-directed retreat? The WVIS retreat house is open for 10-days each month offering 3-, 5-, or 8-day retreats.

Curious about doing the 19th Annotation Retreat in Daily Life? Let us connect you with someone who can journey with you.

Just want to learn more? Please email us at exec.director@wvis.org.

Reflections and Happenings

The Adventure Continues...

When I began the Spiritual Direction Internship Program, I was expecting an adventure, and I was not disappointed. God's work of companioning someone as they journey into a deeper relationship with Him is a sacred privilege. The program, led by extremely knowledgeable and kind instructors, has taken me out of my comfort zone. I accomplished things I never imagined could have brought me joy, such as leading group spiritual direction and attending retreats. Although a great deal of information is provided, the WVIS staff was incredibly helpful and supportive as I nervously navigated through these new experiences. I discovered the program is not only a training in directing others, but a discovery of self. Through the process of learning how to guide others, you learn about who and what guides you.

*Lisa Reese is a WVIS
Spiritual Director Intern,
from Bridgeport, WV*



The WVIS initial Spiritual Training program is a part-time program that includes three weekends each semester (over four semesters). Our 2026 cohort of Interns is forming now, and training will begin in September 2026. If you are interested in learning more about this program, you can visit our website <https://www.wvis.org/training/spiritual-direction-initial-training-program> or email our executive director at exec.director@wvis.org.

Mary Embodies the Spirit of Advent Waiting and Hope

Pope Leo XIV ended his first public blessing with the Hail Mary after invoking the feast of day of Our Lady of Pompei. Mother's Day also coincided with his first public Sunday Noon blessing.

According to Gospel, Mary is the mother of Jesus, and the mystery of the incarnation of the son of God through her is central to Christian belief. Represented in art in different ways across the world — old, young, pregnant, holding baby Jesus or standing alone — she is both portrayed as white and dark skinned. Sometimes misunderstood, Mary is not worshiped in Catholic tradition, but rather is looked to for intercession and connection to God and her son, Jesus, through her prayers. Her relatability as a mother figure, her role in Christ's life, and her piety makes her appealing as an intercessor before God and Jesus.

In the Catholic practice, May is known as "the month of Mary" and August 15th is the date of the Feast of the Assumption, celebrating Mary being taken body and soul into heaven. However, it is Advent where Mary is central, serving as a guide who embodies the spirit of waiting, hope and preparation for the coming of Jesus. Catholics celebrate her, especially on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (Dec. 8), which highlights God's preparation of Mary to be the vessel for his Son. Regardless of religious beliefs, anyone can see Mary as inspiration in faith, hope and awe, which are all part of the human experience.



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