# Travels with Charley:
## A Congenial Congregation with the Sisters of Saint Joseph in Nazareth

*by Charles McKelvy*

I said it on September 27, 2001 in these pages, and I say it again now in the Beacher:

Nearby Nazareth, Michigan is truly an island of calm close to home, especially during the hectic holiday season.

I wrote (and write) specifically about the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph who "promote unity, reconciliation and harmony among those seeking the richness of spirituality in their everyday lives."

In the dark days after Tuesday, September 11, 2001, Natalie and I sought comfort close to home, and we found it in abundance at the Congregation's Transformations Spirituality Center at 3427 Gull Road in what is essentially the first suburb east of Kalamazoo.

A place of Transformations just east of Kalamazoo. A gateway to peace.

We went specifically to see my wise spiritual director, one Sister Gertrude Maurer, CSJ, and to get Sister Gertrude's good orderly direction. We got it in good measure, because Sister Gertrude has been expertly guiding me along life's path since October 1999.

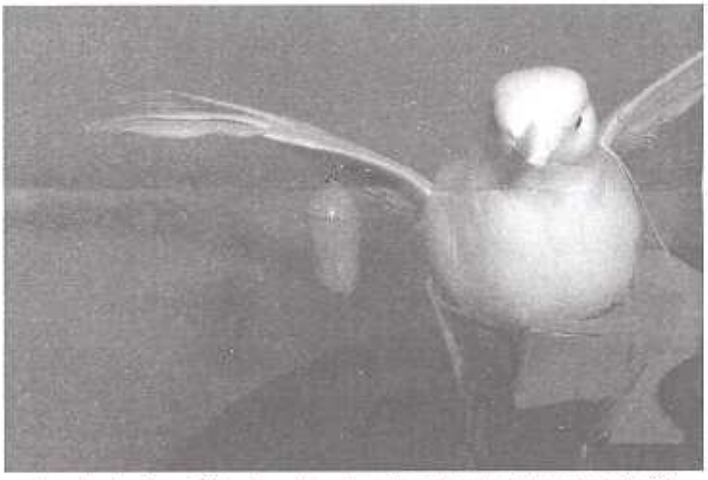
So, of course, Sister Gertrude Maurer was the go-to-spiritual director in the aftermath of 9/11/01, and she has charted me through many other troubled waters since then.

And so when I set out recently to seek Sister Gertrude's guidance on the pressing problems of recent days, I invited my good friend Roy Thompson to join me for the journey to Nazareth and to take a side trip to lovely Lawton to visit with our mutual friend, Lavern Mayer. Neither Roy nor Lavern, by the way, are strangers to these hallowed pages, so I am pleased to reacquaint them both with you now.

Sister Gertrude Mauer, CSJ has been giving the author good, orderly spiritual direction since October 1999.

Just as I am pleased to finally present a photograph of Sister Gertrude Maurer, CSJ. And be it further noted that Sister Gertrude is not only a certified Spiritual Director, but the holder of a doctorate in American literature.

So, yes, Sister Gertrude and I do refer books and authors to one another when we meet, but we mainly concern ourselves with the process of transformation, and Sister Gertrude had the perfect metaphor for spiritual growth waiting for me when Roy and I arrived at Nazareth the other day: she told how she had had a Monarch butterfly's chrysalis suspended from the wing of the true and lifelike model of a dove in her office before releasing the "adult" butterfly into the wild for its flight to Mexico for the winter.



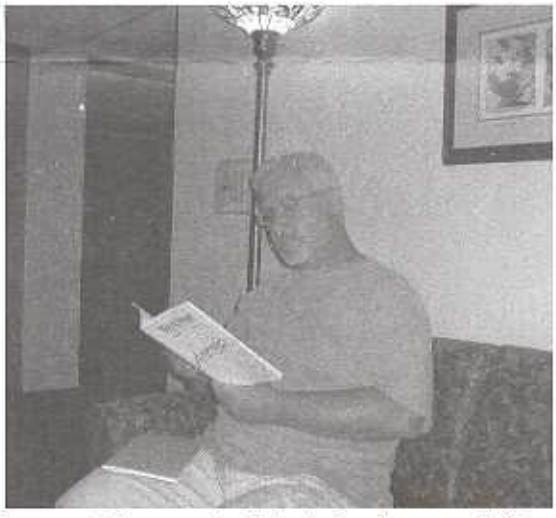
A metaphor for spiritual growth – the chrysalis of a Monarch butterfly (hanging from the wing of the dove) in Sister Gertrude's office prior to her releasing the "adult" butterfly before winter.

I pondered that story of release as I lighted the candle that guides our meditations. Sister Gertrude explained that a friend who rescues Monarchs had entrusted the chrysalis to her with the understanding that Sister Gertrude would release the beautiful butterfly upon its emergence in an appropriate garden spot outside, which she dutifully did before

the wicked winds of winter came a blowing our way. Sister Gertrude said she released the butterfly in the perfect outdoor spot, and she noted that there came a point in the metamorphosis when the contents of the chrysalis were neither caterpillar nor butterfly.

That gave us plenty to ponder as Sister Lucy Schneider, CSJ graciously conducted Roy Thompson on a tour of the conference center, Holy Family Chapel, and the serenely quiet Spirituality Center.

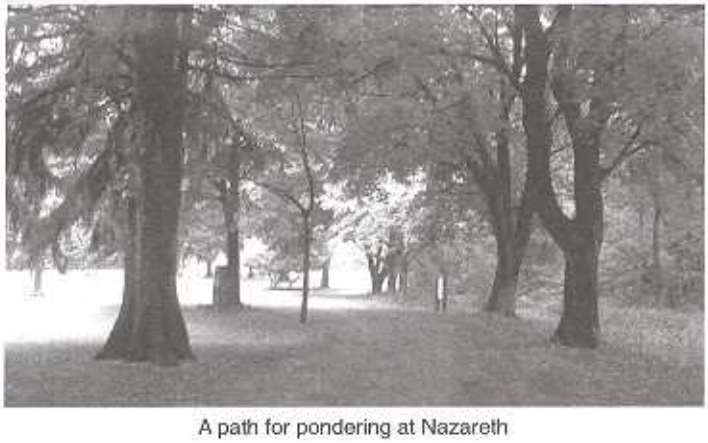
When Sister Gertrude had set me on a proper spiritual path, I found Roy reading some provided material in the Spirituality Center. I knew he wouldn't be bored waiting for me, and he was so absorbed in his booklet that I did not want to interrupt him.



Roy Thompson finds peace at the Transformations Spirituality Center.

In fact, Roy said he wanted to take the good Sisters up on their offer to, as they say: "create your own retreat experience. The resources of our facility are at your disposal: libraries, prayer rooms, spiritual direction, Unity Chapel. Gazebo, walking trails and the Reconciliation Labyrinth."

All that and acres and acres of woods, meadows, orchards, and wetlands for all to enjoy.



A path for pondering at Nazareth

I assured Roy that I had truly enjoyed the retreats I have made at Nazareth, and then we set out through the stress-free Kalamazoo rush hour to reacquaint ourselves with our dear friend Lavern Mayer at her new digs in Lawton. After a comical

The author goes forth after receiving spiritual direction from Sister Gertrude. (photo by Roy Thompson)

miscue, we did find Lavern waiting in her chair for us, and, as promised, we took her out on the town for dinner at one of downtown Lawton's fine restaurants.

Lavern Mayer awaits her gentlemen callers in Lawton. She had to wait a little longer than expected, because they got lost on the way. Sorry, Lavern.

We remembered Lavern's dear husband Joseph, whom she lost on March 29, 2007, and we planned our next visit for October. Noting that it would nearly coincide with the Christmas season promised to wear seasonal attire. But nothing too frosty, because, after all, we will have been to Nazareth first.

And one does not walk away from Transformations Spirituality Center in Nazareth without spreading one's wings and soaring like a butterfly. So maybe we'll arrive as a caterpillar and a butterfly. Roy, you get to be the caterpillar. All right?

Well, we'll see, and you will certainly see some wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth if you but visit the Transformations website at: www.transformationscenter.org. Or, phone them at: 269/381-6290 ext. 310, or write: Transformations Spirituality Center, 3427 Gull Rd., PO Box 2, Nazareth, MI 49074.

You will truly be transformed, and now please go in peace.