

Benedictine Sisters Building Green Monastery

Sisters Trying To Raise \$1.5 Million To Fund New Monastery

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MIDDLETON, Wis. -- They're known for living a very simple life, and now the Benedictine Women of Madison are looking towards a greener life.

The women are part of the Holy Wisdom Monastery in Middleton, and they're making waves in the green initiative for their new monastery building.

The sisters are aiming high -- their goal is to construct the greenest building in the United States. They're combining the latest and greatest eco-friendly technology with a century's old tradition and belief in sustainability and caring for the earth.

The Holy Wisdom Monastery is tucked away between the hills and valleys of north-east Middleton and has a view overlooking Madison's isthmus. Those who have discovered the monastery said they know about its importance.

"We talk a lot about taking care of the earth," volunteer Anne Baltes said. "And there's no better way to do that than to come out and actually do it."

Baltes and her daughter, Grace, are just two of dozens of volunteers working to restore the prairie land leading up to Holy Wisdom's new monastery building.

The monastery's sisters joke that it's been a long pregnancy -- of planning and research. Their new building is just a few months away from completion, and it's a building that mimics their beliefs and values.

Neal Smith, executive director of administration at Holy Wisdom, said the sisters' missions are built into the new structure: prayer, hospitality, justice and care for the earth.

"The sisters have decided that it's one of the ways they're going to care for the land -- by having a building that's green and sustainable," Smith said.

The eco-friendly elements are a big part of the building. There are solar tubes that bring in natural light; every window is custom-tinted, for ample sunlight and minimal reflection; the building will primarily be heated and cooled using geothermal energy; and solar panels on the rooftop will help generate 15 percent of the building's electrical needs.

The sisters said they hope this building will be the greenest building in the country. But it's more than a building for those who have worked on it -- it's a message.

"(It's) a way for us to have a chance to practice all the things that we talk about being important in life," Baltes said.

The project was not a cheap one to accomplish. The Benedictine Sisters are still trying to raise \$1.5 million to fund the new monastery.

Those who want to learn more about the project, or make a donation, can [visit this Web site](#).

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