



When the Benedictine Women of Madison concluded that their obsolete, energy-inefficient, former boarding school needed to be replaced with a smaller building that would effectively support their mission and vision, they required that all aspects of the project be designed to achieve a very high level of sustainability – a LEED® Platinum rating. What they received was the **highest-rated LEED-NC Platinum building in the country** to date. Achieving 63 out of a possible 69 points under LEED-NC v2.2, Holy Wisdom Monastery was completed at a total project square foot cost of \$246.

## Benedictine Women of Madison

### Madison, Wisconsin

The new monastery offered an opportunity to explore what a 21st century Benedictine monastery could be. With no prototype to follow, the design team collaborated closely with the sisters and used their mission statement as a guide. *Weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and care for the earth into a shared way of life as an ecumenical Benedictine community* indicated a need to provide appropriate spaces for worship, concerts, gathering, dining, meetings, lectures, reading, and administration. The desire to achieve the most cost-effective, sustainable solution guided every decision.

Inside and out, the sisters demanded a strict monastic esthetic of monochromatic, neutral colors and unadorned simplicity so there would be no visual distractions to quiet contemplation. The extensive engineering requirements were therefore designed to be as

unobtrusive as possible so the casual visitor is unaware of the geothermal and radiant heating systems and may not even notice the photovoltaic (PV) panels on the rear of the chapel roof. Over time, more PV panels will be added until the new monastery supplies all its net energy needs through on-site, renewable energy sources.

The new monastery is successful in its attempt to fit in with its surroundings. Set on the shoulder of a hill at the edge of the original parking lot, it spared most of the mature and memorial trees. The rectilinear forms respect the existing buildings and transition to curving forms that are more feminine and relate to the contours of the land. The large, carefully placed windows capture and frame spectacular views of lakes, trees, and the restored prairie, promoting spiritual renewal through communion with nature.



#### Project Achievements

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®) Platinum | New Construction LEED-NC  
Highest-rated LEED-NC Platinum building in the United States

The Associated General Contractors (AGC) of America | 2009 AON Build America Merit Award  
*Wisconsin Builder* magazine | 2009 Top Project

#### Scope/Area

New/Deconstruction  
34,300 sq. ft.

Completed  
August 2009



original Benedict House



The Benedictine sisters moved from Iowa to the Madison Diocese in 1953 to build a monastery and a Catholic girls' high school. In 1966, they closed the school and opened Saint Benedict Center, a retreat and conference facility. However, the design of the school, Benedict House, never effectively supported their mission. By 2006, the Benedictine Women of Madison were ready to replace it with a smaller, energy-efficient monastery that would support their vision of *weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and care for the earth into a shared way of life as an ecumenical Benedictine community.*

## Deconstruction of Benedict House

### Madison, Wisconsin

The decision to decommission and deconstruct a building can be emotionally wrenching. However, as the cost of operating Benedict House was \$100,000 a year, the sisters were anxious to be free of the financial burden, even before the new building was ready. The challenge was that its mechanical room, located in the sub-basement, housed many of the utilities that serviced the existing monastery which, with office and retreat spaces, needed to remain operational throughout the construction period. The decision was made to carefully deconstruct the upper four stories, saving the partially exposed, sub-basement that was provided with a vegetated roof and remodeled to create a maintenance building to serve the entire campus.

Prior to deconstruction, the organ and walk-in cooler were removed, refurbished and stored for installation in the new building. Habitat Restore salvaged nine tons of reusable building material and 8,628.6 tons were sorted and recycled, including the concrete and masonry which were crushed for use as a base for parking and drives and sculpted into berms. Only 12.5 tons of the 60,000 square foot building was discarded. In all, 99.75% of Benedict House was diverted from the landfill - an exemplary feat consistent with the sisters' desire to be as sustainable as possible in all their actions.

