



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.

