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To whom it may concern,

My name is Rachel Porter, a member of the parish of St. John Vianney, in the Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas, and I recently left a religious order, the Benedictines of Mary, based in Gower, MO, after spending a total of four years with the community. This community was very highly recommended to me and generally enjoys popular high respect. During the time that I was there, I experienced and witnessed many things which bothered me; nevertheless, I didn't recognize at the time that any of these situations were highly problematic. I began to struggle emotionally, spiritually, and mentally in ways that I previously never had. Eventually I left, for the reasons I give later on in this document. After leaving the community, I began to talk to various priests and lay people about my experiences, and began to realize that I had been severely mentally, emotionally, and spiritually abused by the superiors. I have talked with other former members of this community, who experienced similar behaviour within the community and have been sharing their experiences with priests, religious, and laypeople who are seriously concerned.

At this point, I feel that it is my duty to report the situation and the things I experienced to higher authorities. My reasons are; first, that the Rule of St. Benedict states, concerning abuses that might happen within a monastery: "But if even the whole community, which God forbid, should by agreement among themselves choose a person who is a consenting party to their faults and those faults somehow should come to the knowledge of the bishop to whose diocese that place belongs, or should be manifest to the abbots and faithful of the vicinity, let them not suffer the agreement of the wicked to prevail, but let them appoint a steward worthy of the house of God, knowing that for this they will receive a good reward if they do it of pure zeal for God, just as, contrariwise, they will receive punishment if they neglect to do so." (Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 64) Thus, according to St. Benedict, the faithful who find out about an abusive situation within a monastery have a duty to inform the authorities. The second reason is that I deeply love and care about all my sisters within that community, who are suffering terrible abuse without even being aware that this is so. As was the case with me during my time in the community, I believe that most of the sisters who are still there have no idea that the community is unhealthy, largely because they are not aware of what healthy religious life looks like. Many of these sisters entered straight out of high school, and without any previous encounters with religious life. My hope in reporting what I experienced is that a way may be found to help the community heal and move forward in a healthy way, rather than be disbanded or implode.

I have included below first a general summary and outline of the abusive behaviour I experienced, so that these issues will be clear at a glance. Afterwards, I have given detailed descriptions of particular events and situations. Most of these I personally witnessed; some I was told second-hand. In the cases where I did not personally witness what I share here, I have indicated that this is so.

I am willing to discuss all of this and to answer any questions, over the phone or in person, if that were desired. I will keep everyone who reads this document in my prayers.

In Christ,

Rachel A. Porter.

Summary and General Outline

It might be helpful to explain here that during the time I spent in Gower, the community experienced what was called a “demonic outbreak.” A large number of sisters began experiencing strange mental and physical symptoms of illness. This included episodes of mental or emotional breakdown, such that sisters were not cognitive. Some sisters experienced seizures, flashbacks, panic attacks, or refusal to eat. Many treatments were tried, with none really helping. Some of the sisters came close to death, and a number including myself were sent for treatment to a clinic in Texas.

After a month or two of ineffectual treatment, someone suggested that perhaps the issue was demonic rather than physical. At this point, two exorcists were brought in. The sisters were not examined by a psychologist to rule out mental illness, despite the fact that a number of doctors advised mental health treatment.

One exorcist only stayed for about a week in Texas, and I do not remember his name. The sisters returned to the property at Gower then, where the second priest, a young and totally new and inexperienced exorcist, Fr. Stengle of the ██████ Fathers, stayed for more than half a year, working on the property at Gower. This was a period of complete chaos. A third exorcist, Fr. Martin ██████ of the Transalpine Redemptorists, finally arrived, and seemed to be able to end the dramatic aspect of the demonic attacks. Nevertheless, as is mentioned below, the community is still suffering from unusual ‘spiritual’ attacks. More details are given further on.

Mother Abbess Cecilia ██████ is the highest superior; Sr. Scholastica is her Prioress and the Novice Mistress; Sr. Misericordia is the Sub-Prioress, all at Gower. Gower, the motherhouse, has three daughterhouse foundations over which Gower presides, one of which is Ava, where I spent a year after spending three years at Gower. The superior in Ava is Mother Mary Josefa, and her subprioress is Sr. Sophia. Ava is a dependent of the Abbey at Gower.

It may be important to say that sisters under 18 years of age were present in this community and also witnessed much of this behaviour.

My religious name in this community was Sr. Maryam Gertrude.

A. Emotional abuse

1. Emotional manipulation
 - a. Love bombing, especially the new arrivals
 - b. Personalized manipulation, including withdrawal, the cold treatment, isolation of individual sisters, idolization of the superiors, playing on sisters’ fears
2. Intimidating behaviour
 - a. Mother Abbess’ rage, banging her crosier over and over on the floor
 - b. Mother Abbess’ and Sr. Scholastica’s glare, “microwave eyes”
3. Public mortification of sisters
 - a. Sisters corrected before the community with disdain and scorn
 - b. Public, non-spontaneous confessions of guilt or internal faults

- c. Sisters ridiculed or bullied before the community
 - 4. Lack of honesty on the part of superiors
 - a. Blaming things on the exorcist
 - b. Lying about the effectiveness of the exorcisms in order to persuade sisters to cooperate
 - c. Lying about the continued presence of unusual demonic attacks
 - 5. Gaslighting, questioning sisters' perception of reality
 - a. Insinuating mental health or emotional problems in sisters who struggle
 - b. Undermining trust in sisters' family formation growing up
 - c. Telling sisters they are imagining their health problems
 - d. Telling sisters that God is not pleased with the way they pray, etc.
 - e. Twisting or denying historical events
- B. Verbal abuse
 - 1. Sr. Misericordia, the sub -prioress, verbally cutting sisters
 - 2. Sr. Scholastica, the novice mistress, verbally beating sisters down
 - Postulants and novices sometimes left meetings with her crying
 - My personal encounters with her, especially during the demonic era
- C. Physical abuse
 - 1. Sisters who were having demonic attacks were tied to pillars in the Church
 - 2. One sister was tied to a mattress, gagged, and covered with a sheet in the sisters' sewing room while sisters were working there.
 - 3. The superiors stuffed a sister's mouth with a dirty sock during an exorcist session
 - 4. A sister was "spanked" by Mother Abbess to help the demon leave
- D. Inappropriate behaviour
 - 1. "Graphic" discussion by Sr. Scholastica of women's cycles, etc.
 - 2. During exorcisms, sisters would lay on top of other sisters, hug closely, and engage in other inappropriate physical behaviour
 - 3. Sr. Marie Therese several times laid in Sr. Margaret Mary's lap - we were told this made her nervous system calm down.
 - 4. Mother Abbess laid in a bed with Sr. Josephine who was sick and not in her right mind
 - 5. Special sisters were chosen to give Mother Abbess foot rubs and neck or back massages.
 - 6. Certain sisters also gave minor chiropractic adjustments in a closed room
 - 7. Mother Abbess would make the sign of the cross in different places on my body, particularly on my breast.
 - 8. Mother Abbess told sisters to kiss the hands, feet, and other parts of sisters' bodies to 'torture the demons.' Mother Abbess would also kiss sisters' faces or breathe on them.
- E. Abuse of Conscience
 - 1. Pressure to suppress doubts
 - 2. Questioning leadership framed as moral failure, pride, or lack of faith
 - 3. Obedience elevated over discernment
 - 4. Micromanaging by Mother Abbess
 - a. mistakes or unwilling faults are treated as sin and disobedience
 - b. Whole community tries to please her in the smallest things
 - c. She is upset at small annoyances

- Such as sisters coughing during the Office when sick
 - Sisters breathing loudly, or holding their heads a certain way
- 5. Doubt is treated as sin, pride, trauma, or demonic influence
- 6. Moral unease is reframed as “resistance,” “lack of surrender,” or “ego”
- 7. Obedience is praised over truth-seeking
- 8. Members are trained to distrust their own moral perception
- 9. Mother Abbess claims to read sisters’ souls, and know whether or not they have vocations
- 10. Sr. Misericordia said she could read my soul and see I was being disobedient and prideful
- F. Spiritual Abuse, in the way exorcisms were conducted
 1. Sisters were instructed to “push forward the demon” from deep within their psychology, meaning letting the demon have control during sessions. Exorcists later told us this was extremely dangerous and could have resulted in possession.
 2. Sisters instructed to “take responsibility” for demonic attacks, as such attacks ‘proved’ they were sinning or committing some fault that was letting the demon in.
 3. The demons were “drawn” from one sister to another, and most often out of sisters into Mother Abbess.
- G. Cult behaviour
 1. Possible pressure to join?
 2. Pressure not to leave.
 - a. Leaving often portrayed negatively, as prideful self-will, lack of conformity to God’s Will, or psychological collapse
 - b. Some former members reported being pressured to stay, and their requests to leave dismissed for months
 3. Sisters experience unusual supernatural experiences
 - a. Mother Abbess claims to have seen Heaven and to hear Jesus speak to her
 - b. Sr. Scholastica many times has had visions in her dreams
 - c. Sr. Josephine regularly has visions
 - d. At least three other sisters had visions during the worst of the demonic era, that were encouraged before the whole community
 - e. These were encouraged and faith put in them, with very little discernment, almost superstitiously.
 4. Absolute loyalty to, and idolization of, Mother Abbess
 - a. She is seen as a holy mystic who is closely united to Christ
 - b. Criticism is not allowed
 - c. Special songs, skits, meals, decorations, etc. are constantly encouraged for Mother Abbess
 5. Control of relationships
 - a. “Us vs. them” worldview
 - b. Outside voices (family, Church authorities, therapists) discredited
 - Distrust and lack of honesty during canonical visitations
 - Secrecy about internal affairs of the convent
 - Lack of respect for Church authorities, including the Pope and the ordinary

- Exorcists were brought in without the knowledge or permission of the ordinary.
 - My request to talk to a priest on a matter of conscience was denied, until I insisted on my right under canon law to do so.
- c. Isolation from outsiders
 - Put on a fake face to visitors and the outside world
- d. "Fierce" loyalty to group replaces normal bonds
- e. Normal friendships between sisters were nearly impossible
- f. "Special" sisters chosen to perform small tasks for Mother Abbess or the novice mistress
- g. Private conversations with the novice mistress were reported to the superiors. Further, details from such private conversations were often shared with the community or individual sisters.
- 6. Control of information
 - a. Outside criticism is pre-interpreted as persecution
 - b. Former members are portrayed as bitter, unstable, or dangerous
 - c. Leadership defines what "counts" as legitimate authority
- 7. Fear-based spirituality
 - a. God is subtly portrayed as displeased if you leave
 - b. Blessings are tied to loyalty; suffering is blamed on disobedience
 - c. The group is framed as a special ark or remnant, of the Latin Mass, Tradition, and contemplative Benedictine life.
- H. Neglect of Health
 - 1. Waiting until sisters are gravely ill before addressing health concerns
 - 2. Treating sick sisters like they are making their symptoms up or looking for attention
 - 3. Requests for exceptions at table or for extra sleep are discouraged as "doorways to let in demons."
- I. Priority of work over more important things, such as prayer or formation
- J. Lack of formation
 - 1. Meetings with the novice mistress and one-on-one formation cancelled, downplayed, or made low priority
 - 2. Formation classes cancelled, or put on the back burner
- K. Emotional instability in the community, even among solemn - professed
 - 1. Sr. Grace, solemn professed, reported as yelling at Mother Abbess
 - 2. Sr. Marie-Bernard, solemn professed, confessed being terribly afraid
 - 3. Sr. Benedicta, solemn professed, and other sisters, sobbing in the church
 - 4. Mother Abbess seems to rely on the community for emotional support, and struggles with hopelessness
 - 5. The novice mistress, Sr. Scholastica, struggles with fear, especially of suffering and what other people think
 - 6. A need for extra recreations and sweets that seems out of proportion
 - 7. Many sisters struggle with depression, fear, guilt.
 - 8. Several sisters tried at various times to run away from the monastery, which was treated as a demonic manifestation
 - 9. Several sisters also struggled with suicidal thoughts
 - 10. Mother Abbess and the solemn professed don't seem very happy

- L. Anger, lack of charity, and frustration connected with the former superior and their formation under her

Personal Testimony

MA=Mother Abbess

SS=Sr. Scholastica, prioress at Gower and novice mistress

MMJ=Mother Mary Josefa, prioress and superior at Ava

- One of the things that first bothered me after I entered Gower was the way I felt emotionally attached to my novice mistress, Sr. Scholastica. Looking back it seems like maybe she was doing it on purpose- she would do strange things, like reaching out to touch my hand as we talked during private meetings, singling me out during recreations and giving me attention that made me feel uncomfortable. Once during a private meeting when I was a novice, she wanted to see if the glands in my neck were swollen, and made me uncomfortable by feeling my neck while standing behind me. In later years I saw that this was a pattern with many of the novitiate sisters and new people coming in - this odd emotional pull and attachment. When I first noticed it in myself I felt guilty about it; I couldn't stop thinking about her and how I wanted to please her and what she would think, etc. I'd never experienced this in any relationship before. One night I even had a half awake dream where I dreamt she took me out into the forest one night and immolated me on an altar to God. When I came out of it I was really disturbed, especially by the way it emotionally attracted me. I confessed struggling with this obsession with her, although not the dream which I was ashamed of, to her - since she was my novice mistress and I was really struggling with it. She said it was alright as long as I loved Mother Abbess and Our Lord more than her. I still felt uncomfortable however, and started gently resisting her advances and communicating that I didn't want her attention all the time. Then everything flipped - she started ignoring me altogether, treating me coldly when we had meetings, and making a point to give all her attention to a particular other novitiate sister at recreation. I started feeling envious, and confessed this to her as well, which seemed to make everything worse; and I really started to struggle with guilt, wondering why I was struggling so much emotionally. Later on, she told other sisters - sometimes in my presence and at other times in private conversations, (especially the novitiate), that I "had a problem with her." I tried to explain things to her and protest that I didn't have a problem with her, but that made it worse. She told me once, "Yeah, I told Mother Abbess; I feel like you just hate my guts." I really felt bad all the time and couldn't behave normally around her because I felt so guilty, and everything I did seemed to make things worse. In later years I noticed that this was a pattern, in varying degrees, with the relations between many of the novitiate sisters and the novice mistress. I also saw this sort of relationship - a kind of emotional obsession - with Mother Abbess, at least once in the case of a first professed sister; which the entire community knew about. This also happened on a lesser scale between sisters as well, although these latter cases the superiors strictly discouraged as particular friendships. It's almost like there wasn't a healthy sense of affection and friendship between community members;

everyone is so isolated from one another; and so all sorts of unhealthy emotional attachments came up. There was this idea that all our affection was to be reserved for Christ as our spouse and so we should be careful about showing affection to our sisters and superiors. St. Therese's story about grabbing the bannisters as she walked past her sister's office in order to keep herself from going in to look for affection was quoted a lot. I myself found this idea of reserving all affection for Christ confusing, and felt like the more one learned to love Christ the more one felt impelled to pour out that love on her sisters and superiors; and I began to wonder if that was a sign that I didn't have a vocation after all. It was like it wasn't safe to love others until we were saints and could be perfectly detached from them. In chapter talks, MA said things like if one had a need for attention or affection or were struggling emotionally it was probably a sign that one didn't have a vocation and needed a spouse to fill that need. It also bothered me how so much affection and love was showered on the Abbey dogs by the superiors especially, and yet the sisters didn't get that sort of love at all. I didn't feel like I could have real relationships with sisters - like it was wrong to get to know them well. I did notice that Ava seemed more balanced in this area; there was a lot more affection and love between the sisters and from the superior as well, and I thought it was interesting that the sisters in Ava didn't seem to struggle as much emotionally. In Gower especially, many sisters struggled with uncontrollable giggle or laughing fits, which got a lot better in the ones who were moved to Ava. The sisters at Ava generally seemed a lot happier, more emotionally mature, and more fully themselves, at least in the novitiate.

- Another thing that made me uncomfortable during my meetings with Sr. Scholastica in the beginning was when she addressed womanly processes, such as our cycles and how they affect us. She apologized off-handedly to me once for presenting it so "graphically" - that is a direct quote. On the candidate questionnaire that we filled out after living in the monastery for a month or so was a question asking whether I was "easily stimulated," and another as to how I felt in "mixed company." Being very naive and innocent of such matters, I asked her during a meeting what these two terms referred to. I was embarrassed by her explanations, and even more embarrassed that they asked such questions. I felt that I was being educated in something that I didn't need to know about to be a good religious.
- The second thing I remember bothering me was how depressed and just unhappy Mother Abbess seemed to be when I first entered. I just thought she was going through a dark night of the soul and prayed a lot for her, but I remember feeling guilty because I was so happy entering religious life, unable to contain my joy, which everyone noticed, and she, who had been serving God for so long, was so unhappy. And not just her, but most of the sisters. One of the first chapter talks I remember was about how some people in the novitiate seemed to think lightly of this life and how serious it is, how souls are at stake and this isn't a place for laughter.
- Another thing that bothered me was the way they talked about their former superior. There seemed to be so much anger and frustration still and they seemed to feel like they had to justify themselves and their obedience to her so defensively; at the same time there was an air of mystery and secrecy about what precisely had been wrong. Mother Abbess would say things like, when you're professed we'll tell you more about that.

Mother Abbess said once during a chapter talk: "do you think any of us would still be here if we hadn't been heroically obedient?" There was a general attitude that the older professed sisters had suffered so much and so heroically under the former superior - the new members had nothing to complain of. They had things so easy... There was this divide between the older professed and all the ones who came after the former superior. It felt like they had a sort of club that we new people were left out of. We weren't important; our struggles weren't important... They said that part of the reason the former superior was so bad was that she didn't have a real formation because she had been formed in an abusive and messed up community: without seeming to see that, by the same criterion, they themselves had not had a real formation. It felt like they had to put her down in order to feel like they themselves were right, almost as if they felt guilty and had to try to convince new members that they had been right. Another thing that bothered me was that under the old superior they had hidden from the various visitators what was going on and said that everything was alright because they were afraid of what would happen if they spoke up. And yet, I noticed the same fear and lack of trust in the visitators, now. They saw the visitation that removed their former superior as such a blessing, and yet they didn't seem to put much faith in the visitations we had now. Before one of the visitations I was present for, MA told us in chapter that "they can't do anything against us as long as we are united. Charity, union. No matter how much anyone persecutes us, as long as we are loyal to the authority and to each other, they can't do anything. We must never let them divide us." She mentioned how the Carmelites in Valparaiso were being visited as if it were a bad thing, a persecution of the Latin Mass. After the visitations MA read aloud the visitator's recommendations in Chapter. Technically, she didn't say anything against them, but her body language was communicating: "this is a formality, of course they don't understand us or know what they're talking about: they advise us to consider bringing in extraordinary confessors - of course we don't need that, etc." I asked my novice mistress, SS, after my first visitation if it was normal for sisters to complain about things like not having extraordinary confessors, and I also mentioned being surprised at some of the things the visitators had encouraged the community to work on. For example, they said that the novices who were about to make vows were naive, and needed to be instructed better before they made vows; and they said the community needed to work on the rift between the older and the younger sisters. My novice mistress told me that visitations are only supposed to be for abuses, like getting a superior removed, they're not supposed to be complaining sessions, and she seemed kind of disgusted that a sister had mentioned the extraordinary confessors to the visitators. She also said not to take what the visitators had said they saw as issues to be worked on too seriously, as they have to make a report that "is not too good," because nowadays a good report would attract too much unwanted attention with the way the Church is run. Visitations were useful if there was some real abuse, but most of the time they were just formalities to be gone through, and it would be a kind of disloyalty and lack of charity and humility on the part of the sisters to complain about little things - after all, regular visitations, she said, are more of a modern institution and didn't really exist in early monasticism. The visitation they had after the demonic outbreak was really strange too. Before it started, Mother Abbess told the

community that she had asked for a visitation “just in case anyone asked any questions later.” She talked to the visitors first, and told us that we didn’t need to mention any details about the demonic stuff, as she had already told them everything they needed to know and we “don’t want to worry them.” With the attitude that they wouldn’t understand the specialness of the situation and of course it would be a bad thing for the whole community if anyone began to be concerned. The whole thing was a formality; and the visitors clearly weren’t aware of the gravity of the situation, as I could see from the questions they asked me and the way they spoke about everything. I felt too guilty and unsure to outright say anything was wrong, and I didn’t think they would believe me. I was sure they would think I was just prideful, critical, and disobedient, and would tell my superiors that I didn’t have a vocation. Not to mention, all the professed sisters had already been interviewed, and apparently hadn’t raised any concerns.

- Another disturbing pattern I began to notice was the need to find compensation in various ways, as if sisters were seeking the happiness they couldn’t find in their vocation itself in other things. Eating so much sugar and sweets that many sisters are getting seriously sick, joking about sugar comas and sugar crashes after major feastdays; a need for noise, a kind of reliance on having extra recreations and treats which struck me as a kind of escaping from suffering rather than a healthy relaxation. It was like we couldn’t show our love for each other without sharing a desert or having a party, like silence was rather uncomfortable. Looking for meaning in their work or hobbies... All these things are normal and human to some extent, but to me it seemed like it was disordered, a source of noise and distraction rather than a “re-creation” and betrayed an interior unhappiness.
- At Gower the workload of the sisters seems to be gradually increasing. For example, in the past year or so MA decided that the sisters should say their private rosaries during free time or lectio instead of during work time, as we had before, since there was so much work. On Sundays at Gower, unless it was your Sunday off (which was once a month,) the sisters worked almost as much as on weekdays. The only difference was that there was more recreation, and if you were lucky, an hour extra free time. Part of this is that the meal preparation takes so much time, especially since the food is not very simple and MA has very high quality standards. In general it seems that work is oftentimes higher priority than it should be, even over prayer.
- I was also troubled by the way sisters were publicly mortified and rebuked in a sort of way that broke down rather than built up; whereas only certain sisters were ever praised, and even they not that much. MA made a point, especially, to publicly humiliate SS, who responded usually by going down on her knees and apologising. When SS was not in the room once, MA said that SS was “the most obedient sister,” setting her up as a standard for us.
- I also remember novices leaving the novice mistress’ office crying after meeting with her, particularly one of my classmates, Sr. Consuela.
- It also happened at intervals that I found a professed sister sobbing in the church. I remember seeing Sr. Benedicta crying which, in particular, impressed me because she wasn’t the sort of person to go around crying like that. Later on, during the demonic era,

many sisters would be crying their hearts out, especially in the church, and everyone would just act like that was normal. No one paid any attention.

- It was discouraged to have one-on-one conversations between sisters: during recreations we were instructed to try to keep up one united conversation rather than break up into smaller groups.
- We were very highly discouraged from discussing problems, either interior or exterior, with each other or “outsiders”. All criticism or complaints were forbidden, on the grounds that this would violate charity.
- For the letters we were allowed to write home, we were instructed to never disclose any interior or exterior difficulty; and to never reveal the inner happenings of the convent. The superiors read every letter, both that the sisters were sent and also that we sent out. If there was anything they didn’t approve of in our letters out they would give the letter back to us and refuse to mail it. SS mentioned having to return letters to sisters because they had been “too preachy” towards their families, or had let out information that was too private. MA told us once that it wasn’t appropriate even to tell our families what books were read at table or at recreation. We were told the letters were meant to show our families that we loved them and that we were happy, and nothing more. We weren’t allowed to ask more than three questions in each letter of our families. After a letter had been replied to, it was thrown away. We weren’t allowed to show our letters or pictures from our family to other sisters without special permission.
- Also the way we tried to please the world, put on a sort of false face and purposely give an impression...Mother Abbess would tell us, “smile, look happy, act more enthusiastic.” Make people see being a Bride of Christ is such a beautiful thing...Especially in the last few years it really started bothering me how the impression we were giving was becoming less and less removed from the actual truth of things. There were more and more videos and public appearances. Especially during the demonic era, when giant fans drowned out the noise of sisters screaming during a manifestation, down the hall from where the faithful were venerating Sr. Wilhelmina’s body. Even to each other in daily life as well, there was a lack of realness. Everyone always had all these masks. No one was allowed to show how they really felt. Everyone put on this farce of happiness and joy and comradery that felt so fake. The thought was, don’t show how much you are suffering, offer it up heroically in silence and make yourself smile for charity’s sake...twice, two different solemn professed sisters, Sr. Grace and Mother Mary Josefa, told me, “you have to choose to be happy where you are. I learned that I had to choose to be happy in my vocation.” I thought, wait, in that case any mortal sinner in the world can “choose to be happy” with his life, if happiness is a choice. But that is not true. Happiness comes from doing God’s Will and from right order. Also, the two sisters who told me this didn’t strike me as particularly happy people...in fact, most of the solemn professed didn’t. They often talked about how one has all these high ideals entering religious life, and then we find out they are unrealistic and become disillusioned. Mother Mary Josefa told me to be careful about having “too high ideals” because the devil can use that against us. She also said that frustration within a monastery is normal, and said that the monks at Clear Creek have the same problems as us. I was surprised when Father B [REDACTED] from Clear Creek actually said the opposite in the retreat he gave us at

Ava; "high ideals are what will carry you through crises in religious life." Mother Mary Francis, P.C.C. as well, in one of her books, says that we shouldn't ever give up our ideals like that.

- Another thing that made me nervous was the way SS would turn around during the Office and stare at us. It was distracting and made me wonder if there was something wrong with the way I prayed... but when I asked her she denied looking at us at all.
- We were all terrified of Mother Abbess's "microwave eyes." Her glare which, as one sister put it, "makes you pop into popcorn and wish you could melt in your seat." Sister Scholastica too - though not as scary. Sister Martina said that during the Office one time she looked up and saw SS glaring at her "like she was just so utterly disgusted with me. I thought, oh, I'm never going to commit the fault she caught me in ever again."
- At one point we got donated a red little laser flashlight. Mother Abbess started bringing it to choir and when she wanted to get the attention of a sister during the Office would play the light on the sister's face and book. Which actually was kind of dangerous because it was the kind that you weren't supposed to look directly at because it could damage your eyes.
- Once we accidentally got donated some obnoxious face makeup. Sister Philippa, kind of a tomboy, hates makeup and fancy dresses, etc. During recreation Sr. Tarcisia held her down in a chair (she was crying and begging them to stop), Sr. Margaret Mary painted her face obnoxiously, and the whole community watched and laughed at her. I remember being really bothered and feeling terrible for her.
- Another time Mother Abbess proposed a staring contest during recreation. Whoever couldn't hold her gaze without smiling or laughing was "out." Very soon it was just her and a postulant (someone who had a very strong will and temperament). After a minute or so Mother Abbess very calmly chewed her out in front of everyone for staring at her superior like that -I was terrified. The postulant started crying, and when some nun drew MA's attention to the fact, she responded by saying: "Yeah, I had to cry many times in my novitiate, over much harder things, and it was good for me. It'll be good for her."
- Certain sisters were chosen to perform special services for Mother Abbess, such as giving her foot rubs, making her special meals on her recollection days, etc. In particular, Sr. Josephine and Sr. Marie Agnes. Sr. Jacinta often gave her back and neck massages.
- In August of 2021, Sr. Josephine fell deadly ill and was taken to a hospital. She had been dangerously ill for months before this, and Mother Abbess had told the community that Sr. Josephine had lost 60 pounds in just a few months. Sr. Josephine was in the hospital for about two weeks, and Mother Abbess, Sr. Grace, and Sr. Marie Bernard were there off and on during this time. Mother Abbess during this time took a video of Sr. Josephine having an attack of pain in the hospital and brought it back to show the community of sisters. The video was inappropriate, because Sr. Josephine was wearing only a hospital gown, and as she thrashed on the bed her legs were totally exposed. Mother Abbess also shared with the community details about Sr. Josephine's bodily processes, such as how she wet herself or had blood, etc. Starting from this time and continuing, as far as I know, to this day, Sr. Josephine has not been in full possession of her reason, and has been deathly sick, coming close to death many times. She cannot

be left alone and is always accompanied by another sister, sometimes a team of sisters. In 2022 she made her first vows in this state.

- In 2022, Sr. Josephine was taken to a doctor in Kansas to have her gall bladder removed. The night after the surgery, Sister was in a state of mental incapacity and physical exhaustion. Sr. Marie Bernard and Sr. Grace were present in the room as Sr. Josephine lay on a bed. I was instructed to sit on a couch inside the door and watch, ready to get Mother Abbess if anything happened. After about an hour, Mother Abbess entered the room dressed in her night clothes. She told me I could leave. As I was leaving the room, Mother Abbess got onto the bed where Sr. Josephine was lying and held onto her, apparently to comfort her.
- It was very often a negative thing when sisters discerned out; I can only think of one time that it was presented positively, as someone actively choosing God's Will in leaving. Every other time it was something like "it didn't work out" or "she just wasn't making enough of an effort" or "well, she decided to leave; we didn't have any problem with her, but, I guess, she has the right to choose (with the unspoken implication that it wasn't the best choice, that she had chosen not to follow God's Will.)" There hardly ever seemed to be any real discernment, like, what is putting you at peace, how is God drawing you, etc. When a sister told me when I entered Ava that Natalie Dalimata left she said that Sr. Scholastica said, "well, she just kept asking to leave, so finally we decided to let her. But she knew as soon as she made the decision that it was the wrong choice. Pray for her; maybe she'll come back in a year or two." Recently I spoke to Natalie and told her this, and she was amazed that that was said about her. She had been asking for months to leave, and certainly never said anything to the effect that she felt she was making the wrong decision or hoped to come back.
- SS said, in a novitiate class with the postulants, that many times sisters came to her or MA asking for help in different areas, for example, in their workplaces, and that most of the time the superior's response was, "no, you don't need help." Her point in telling this was to teach us that we shouldn't go to the superiors except when really necessary.
- When I first got sick (it turned out I had mold behind our cell wall and that probably gave an infection room to take off, and the way they treated it at first made it much worse), no one believed that I was actually sick. Because Sr. Josephine got so sick at about the same time and she was regarded as a saint because of how heroically she bore her sufferings (which she does- she is a beautiful soul), they assumed that I envied the attention she was getting and was pretending or at least imagining that I was sick. What I couldn't understand was that there were other novices who were sick with similar symptoms as I had and they got attention and they were believed, but I wasn't. One day I told my novice mistress that I felt like I was suffocating, my lungs didn't seem to be working right, for about three days now. She said, yeah, lots of sisters feel like that right now and gave me some pills that didn't do anything. A couple days later I collapsed in our cell and started hyperventilating and became partially paralyzed by the panic, and mostly unresponsive. It was a quarter of an hour before my cell mate, Sr. Marie Therese, came in, heard something wrong, and came to check on me. Then she ran down to the novice mistress and told her what was happening and that she thought I might be dying. Sister Scholastica said, "yeah, she just seems to be really struggling right now. She'll be

fine, I don't have time right now to check on her because I have to talk to MA about some important things." My fellow novice was shocked but decided to go to work and just check on me every once and a while. The next time she came I was rasping for breath and completely unresponsive. She was really scared and decided to ask the professed's infirmarian, Sr. Marie-Bernard, what to do. The infirmarian at once said, "Go tell Sr. Scholastica she needs to get up with her novice right now.." "But she's talking to Mother Abbess and their door is closed." "I don't care, you knock on their door and insist that she come up." Sr. Marie Therese did as she was told, timidly interrupting the two superiors, who seemed annoyed. Meanwhile, the infirmarian had come to my cell and started taking care of me: she was pretty much the first one who seemed to take my health problems seriously and didn't treat me like I was making it up. She seemed to know exactly what was the matter with me and how to calm my system down: and when SS came up, suggested what medicine to give me and said I probably needed to go on a detox regime of some sort. SS just stared at me coldly, watching me panicking and shaking, and said: "yeah, Sr. Josephine had something like this in the beginning of her sickness too," and walked out. Not long after that the infirmarian was changed. Sr. Marie Therese told her whole side of this story to me several days later; she expressed surprise that SS had been so dismissive and felt bad for me...Many other times I collapsed in our cell and missed Offices or other community exercises, and usually no one noticed or came to look for me. I was so often made to feel guilty for being so sick - or pretending to be so. I even began to doubt myself that I was as sick as I felt, and tried to force myself to keep going by sheer willpower.

- At one point, I suffered from two allergy attacks because I had been sent to work several weeks in a row with grasses and weeds that I was very allergic to. After this, my novice mistress, Sr. Scholastica, forbade me to step foot outdoors, even for a short walk. Having grown up on a farm in the country and spent much of my life out of doors, this was torture for me. Further, whenever the novitiate was sent out of doors during recreation, I was not allowed to accompany them. The first time that this happened, I did not know what I was supposed to do so I went to find SS to ask her where I should go. She was annoyed and dismissed me, saying, "go work in the toolroom or something." None of the novitiate wanted to stay in the damp, dark toolroom with me, so the senior, Sr. Tarcisia, eventually had to choose two sisters to take turns being with me. Later on, when I started sneezing because of the dust and cat fur in the toolroom, she looked at me pityingly and said, "So, you're being obedient, right." This sort of situation happened many times, and made me feel very isolated. Several weeks later, when I began to feel panicky at being kept indoors all the time, I finally mustered the courage to tell SS I was struggling. She was disgusted, with the attitude that I was high maintenance, and said I could sit on the porch for fifteen minutes each day either early in the morning or late in the evening, since pollen levels were lower then. It wasn't until many months later that I received permission to spend more time out of doors; although the impact on my mental health during those months was severe, particularly since being indoors meant I was exposed to higher levels of the toxic mold in the house. In addition, my allergies did not improve at all during those months that I was kept indoors.

- At some point, I started struggling swallowing food - it would just gag back up. One day, when it was worse than usual, and as I was under obedience to eat as much as I possibly could, I went to SS and told her I couldn't get more than a few bites of food down, and that when I tried to force more down it came back up and my stomach was starting to churn. I asked for permission to make some chicken broth since liquids were easier, and she said yes. I thought, ok, no problem, and made some. A couple hours later Mother Abbess found me and gave me a correction for being disobedient and refusing to eat - she said SS had just told her that I was being defiant. I listened and said nothing until she asked why I wasn't eating. I then explained everything, and said that I had asked just today to make some chicken broth because I wanted to be obedient and get down as many nutrients as I could. She said, oh, okay, that's alright. I couldn't understand what sort of misunderstanding or miscommunication had just happened...SS still treated me like I was making everything up, even years later when other sisters started having the same symptoms and a root cause was discovered. It wasn't until I left Gower and was on the point of joining Ava that she wrote me an email, saying they had just discovered a giant mold infection right behind the wall of my cell, explaining all my health issues. I had been in the moldiest cell in the whole house. She sort of indirectly apologized in the email for "any damage that was done."
- When I entered Ava I started having health problems again. When I brought it up to the superior and said that I thought it might be a combination of the moldy furniture we had just been donated as well as the diet, Mother Mary Josefa told me that some sicknesses were actually psychological and that there was research that showed that mental illness can directly cause physical illness. She mentioned some other former sisters whose health problems had been the first sign that they didn't have a vocation. I responded by saying, yes, I know that's true. But this is not psychological. I still had the same health issues when I spent a year at home after Gower, and they didn't just disappear. Unlike some of the former sisters you just mentioned. Also the fact that physical changes change the symptoms: for example, when I don't eat sugar, I feel ten times better. And when I drink a sugary drink I feel ten times worse, etc. When I fast I feel better. I'm under obedience to eat more, and yet I'm not gaining weight and I am getting sicker and sicker. Whereas when I fasted for a period of time, my health drastically improved over three months, and I gained ten pounds. Not to mention that a majority of the sisters are sick, including solemn professed. Even SS, who almost died because she couldn't keep food down. Mother Mary Josefa responded with "I didn't say your symptoms are psychological! But..." and then she continued talking about how our mental state influences our physical state.
- So many times I was told (even before I started breaking emotionally and mentally) that Mother Abbess and SS were "worried about my mental health." And then I started worrying about it too. Am I crazy? Several different times, especially during the demonic outbreak, my trust in my family growing up was undermined. They said I had "family pride" and implied that my family must have had psychological problems and pride problems "since you struggle with these."
- My parents never got to meet Mother Abbess, despite the fact that I was at Gower for more than three years and was almost going to make vows. My mother said that she

noticed that Mother Abbess would go around and talk to the other sisters' families, but as for my family, she would stand across from them and watch them. My parents said they saw red flags in Mother Abbess' behaviour several times, such as when she and a priest were making signs to each other during Mass once - I believe from their description that this was the last exorcist. My mother said she had been concerned at the way the young sisters who were making vows looked at Mother Abbess in such an idolizing manner.

- Even before the demonic outbreak, Sr. Anastasia had very strange things happen - she would be in her cell and you could hear her shouting and making a bunch of noise and banging on the wall like a crazy person. This happens to be someone I knew fairly well growing up and it was completely uncharacteristic... they said she was sick...
- MA spoke jokingly one time to me and a couple other sisters about how "I almost thought I would have to lock Sr. Grace up" because SGr came into her office one day and just started yelling at her angrily "like she was crazy." This was before the demonic outbreak. MA laughed as if it were a joke of some sort, but I didn't see how it was funny, especially since SGr was in the group and seemed to be pained by the comment.
- Sister Marie Bernard, when I was struggling with panic attacks at one point because of the mold, told me she had struggled a year or two ago with fear real bad and understood how I felt. I wondered at the time what she could possibly have been so afraid of, since she didn't seem to be sick or the type of person that would be afraid of anything
- Soon after I was clothed, novitiate meetings with the novice mistress almost completely stopped, allegedly because she was researching medicine and treatment for Sr. Josephine who became deathly ill. For the first year of my novitiate I had a meeting with her about once every two months for about twenty minutes - it had used to be once every other week for novices, and sometimes hour-long meetings. During the second year of my novitiate it was even less. None of the novitiate knew what was going on - all we knew was that we would be waiting in the evenings for her to come as usual and she never did - the novices and postulants would just wander around in the main room, sometimes starting up whispered conversations, during the time usually spent in lectio divina. Everyone watched to see who would be the lucky one chosen the nights she did come out; and I know I, at least, struggled with frustration and envy when time after time someone else was chosen and not a word of explanation. No one wanted to be the one to ask her, as one novice, Sr. Marie Therese, put it: "I don't want to bug her, like, hey dude, we haven't met for two months!" (Yes, Sister is from California!) She wasn't very encouraging when one did ask to meet: one felt like one was being selfish and taking up her time when she had more important things to do. She would look at the clock frequently as we talked and I could tell she wasn't really interested in what I was saying. And yet, if one didn't wait around for her every night during lectio and she happened to want to talk to you, she would take it as you were purposely avoiding her and not being open. Later on, I found out that this wasn't an unusual situation; I mean, the novice mistress being unavailable. It had happened before, when SS became deathly ill. Again, as a professed sister who had been a novice at that time told me, the novices didn't know what was going on. They vaguely guessed that their novice mistress was sick, and they had to do without her most of the time. At one point in a chapter talk, Mother Abbess said: "you know, in my formation, I got to talk to my superior maybe twice, when I

felt like I really needed it. We didn't even have a novice mistress then. Not that I'm advocating that, but- the novices and postulants need to think about whether they really need to bug their novice mistress so often or if they can actually work through it themselves..." One was made to feel that it was a luxury to talk to or even to have the novice mistress, which the older sisters had most heroically done without. Relying more on the novice mistress was seen as a sign of looking for attention and consolations; the less, the better. The novices also, in their second year of formation in preparation for vows, weren't allowed to talk to the novice mistress any more, unless in a real emergency, and then really only through note. This was supposed to help them detach from SS in preparation for attaching to MA in vows, and also to test them and see if they could survive 'on their own.' In general, SS had such a heavy workload and also spent a lot of time talking to MA. Whenever she got overwhelmed with work, the novices and formation were put on the back burner.

- Because of this, it was really hard to see big groups of new candidates entering every year: since the novice mistress already didn't have time to form those who were in the novitiate, how could she take on a dozen more? It was hard to see her lavish her attention on the aspirants who were visiting, talking with them for hours sometimes, without having time to talk to us.
- Classes during my novitiate stopped in the same way as meetings: for a time they were formally cancelled. Before that time, it happened many times that the students would be waiting in the library for her to come, and she never did; once in a while when we gave up waiting, sure that she was busy doing something else, and we couldn't access her office to ask her, we would go back to work. When she did come, and found no one there or someone missing, she was upset. One day because of the unusual schedule, the novices weren't sure if there was going to be class. We waited around for a while, checked the announcement board, and asked the subprioress if she knew anything, because SS's door was closed, meaning she was unavailable. She didn't know, and she guessed there wouldn't be class. I went back to work, and several of the other novices said they would do the same. Half an hour later one of the novices found me and said there had been class after all, and SS had remarked that I hadn't been there. Later I got a note from her asking what I had meant by not showing up at class and what was the matter with me. She felt like I was giving her an attitude..
- Another thing that bothers me is the way the superiors controlled different sisters in personalized ways, based on each sister's weak points. For example, I was afraid of being sent away, especially because of my poor health; and so every time they wanted me to do something and I balked they threatened to send me away. Other sisters wanted to leave but were manipulated in different ways to keep them from leaving. Some sisters were controlled through positive emotions; idolization and emotional attachment to the superiors. Others through fear, the silent treatment, negativity and derogation. Some sisters were praised and given attention for their obedience and heroic patience in sickness, while others were beaten down as disobedient and ignored when they were sick. "Why aren't you like this sister? She's obedient. She is suffering so much from this sickness. This is your fault. She is suffering to make up for the disobedient and the proud sisters here, for the evil in the Church."

- Some of the sick sisters were sent to Texas to get treated for mold, including me, right before the demonic was 'discovered.' During this time, Sr. Josephine in particular, has an enormous amount of PTSD connected with doctors and hospitals, so it was torture for her to get any treatment; she would regularly literally lose her mind and act like a crazy person just at hearing a doctor's visit mentioned. She has been like this for years now, after a traumatic time in the hospital as a novice. I remember SGr and Sr. Marie-Bernard, who are her caretakers, talking to some of the doctors in Texas once. The doctors, moved with pity at Sr. Josephine's complete terror, after she had been subjected to round after round of ineffectual treatment, suggested that she be given a break for a while, because at this point the stress to her system each time was far overriding the benefits of the treatment. SGr was torn, her eyes so swollen with weeping at seeing her sister suffer so much. She answered, "We have to keep getting the treatment. Mother Abbess has put Sr. Josephine under obedience to get this treatment, and sister knows she has to be obedient. She is choosing obedience freely, offering up the suffering, and she wants to keep going. We have to..." I remember riding to the house we were living in after that incident, and something broke inside me. MA flew down soon after that, to encourage SJp to keep going. This has been going on for years now: sister has been suffering so much, and has gone through so much treatment and even surgeries that didn't help. Each time MA would tell us: this time, she will get better, she just needs to push through this new treatment. It is so much suffering, but only for a little while: soon she will be better, and she is offering all this suffering up for the community and the Church. She said that SJp is sick because the Church is sick, and when SJp heals the Church will heal, and that we all need to pray for this, that "the evil be driven out of her body and out of the Church."
- In Texas, the sick sisters were made to go to get colonic hydrotherapy, a procedure where water is inserted into the colon through a tube and machine. I did not want to have it done, and sat crying in the car, telling the sisters I didn't want the treatment. But as religious we were told to be obedient so I got it. Sr. Josephine had to be physically dragged in, experiencing a panic attack. She kept saying to Sr. Grace, "You promised never to take me back" to get this done - she hated it. Sr. Josephine had been taken before and begged never to have to go back. During my colonotherapy, the lady used a massage gun on my upper legs and on my bottom. It was sexually stimulating, something I had never experienced before and didn't know what it was. All I knew is that I wanted more but also I felt guilty and confused.
- Mother Abbess was in the room for Sr. Laetiana's colonic hydrotherapy, and delighted in watching to see what would come out through the machine. Later she shared with some other sisters, including me, details about the fecal material the machine cleaned out, laughing and joking with pleasure.
- We also had one of these machines installed into the downstairs bathroom on the property at Gower. I do not know for sure if it was ever used, but I do know that bathroom at times was closed off for extended periods of time. I am told it is illegal to privately install such a device or use it without a licensed medical practitioner present, as fatal damage and internal bleeding can occur if it is used improperly.

- Also around this time, I asked for the first time to speak privately with Mother Abbess about something that was bothering me. We went into a side room, where the only furniture was a bunk bed. Initially we sat on the edge of the bottom bed, and then Mother Abbess laid down in the bed as we continued talking. At the time it didn't bother me too much because I was getting used to being in unusual physical situations 'necessitated' by our health problems.
- I was really bothered by the way MA seemed to emotionally rely on the community's support and affection. For example, during the demonic blowup and shortly after one of her anniversaries, I overheard MA telling SS that she felt like none of the sisters cared about how much she was struggling. The next day she didn't come to chapter and SS told us that MA was hurt by our lack of love, that as we grow into a big community we have to watch out more for the herd instinct with everyone just thinking about herself. She said that on MA's anniversary no one bothered to serve MA as she went through the collation line, etc. Meanwhile, the sisters down in Ava treat their superior "like gold." I was surprised because on MA's feastdays everyone pitches in to make it really special - sisters practise skits and songs for weeks, others cook special dishes during free time, etc. Some of her feastdays were almost continual recreations and parties, with a dozen skits or songs, three special meals, a card, decorations in the chapter house, refectory, and choir...Especially during the demonic attacks, she complained a lot about temptations to hopelessness: and SS and Sr. Misericordia were always planning things to cheer her up and telling us she really needed our support - that she was breaking down under all the tension etc. Especially since at this point MA was experiencing "a very close union with Our Lord," it seemed odd that she would look for such consolation from us when she had Him in an extraordinary manner. The demons said that if it weren't for her they would be able to destroy every single sister in the community, and that she was the sole one holding them back. Her sufferings and union with Our Lord, they said, were both the reason they hated and were attacking the community as well as the most powerful force they were up against.
- Another odd thing was how little things would bother MA so much. If someone was breathing loudly during the Office for example, or if the sisters were coughing too much or clearing their throat a lot; she would get so upset and go on about it at recreation or chapter. Or the way a sister walked, or banged doors, or anything annoying. Or if the meal wasn't cooked just right, or some detail was not as she expected it. Everyone just felt really afraid of not pleasing her in every little detail. If she wasn't pleased, we were being disobedient and she felt discouraged and hopeless...how would we ever become saints or be united to the Bridegroom as she was? Why did she waste her time?...
- There was a lot of talk about not criticising the superiors and blaming ourselves instead of the superiors or the community. MA sent a chapter talk to all the houses not long after I entered Ava about this. I thought it was odd because I had just talked to the superior in Ava, mentioning that I was struggling with critical thoughts and it seemed like other sisters were struggling the same way. She told me I was one of the only ones who was critical, along with one other sister who had been damaged by the former superior, and that I was over reacting and mis-perceiving things. She said that the reason some of the older sisters struggled with not being able to trust the superiors and the community was

because they were critical of the former superior. Whereas those who were obedient and trusting came out with less wounds and trauma. Then came this talk a few days later from MA which seemed to imply that there were an awful lot of sisters with the same questions I had. MA read a story about a couple whose marriage was falling apart until the husband stopped blaming his wife and instead started sacrificing himself and showing love towards her. This saved the marriage and she eventually came around and apologized for her behaviour and they had a very happy marriage ever after. MA also referred to St. Therese. She said that being critical, criticizing your superiors and the community and the way things are done, isn't going to help anyone or anything. No community is perfect. You need to stop blaming other people and look at yourself instead, look for ways to give yourself, that is the only way things can change. She said, "Think about St. Therese! She was in a very dysfunctional community! You think if she went around criticising her superiors, criticising this, that, she would be a saint now? Of course not. We would never even have heard of her. She is a saint because she was obedient and humble and she focused on herself and becoming a saint herself. Think about the older professed sisters. Do you think any of us would even be here now if we hadn't decided to be heroically obedient under the former superior? NO."

- Mother Abbess also frequently told us a story about how she learned obedience as a young sister. She said one day, as she was the cellarer, she was sent out to buy ice cream for the sisters. As she was driving along, she was interiorly murmuring, thinking how it was so wrong that they were spending money like this, it was against poverty, etc. And then, she said, she suddenly received the grace to realize that thinking in this way was against obedience just as much as refusing to obey would have been. MA used this story to illustrate that obedience doesn't just mean doing the thing we are commanded: it also means not murmuring or arguing about it in our thoughts.
- Sr. Scholastica said that the former superior particularly seemed to pick on Mother Abbess, focusing much abusive behaviour on her.
- The superiors at Gower, according to what I gathered, brought in the exorcists without informing or asking the permission of their ordinary. When he found out later, he was upset, but Mother Abbess put his concerns to rest by saying that she had been too overwhelmed to think of everything at once, that everything had happened so fast, and that she had intended to tell him.
- To give an idea of what it was like during the demonic outbreak: sisters screaming, running away from the monastery, writhing on the ground, wrestling, hitting, breaking things, tearing off the habit, blaspheming, seeing visions, telling the future, talking in growly voices (although MA was the only one who ever really sounded supernatural), sickness and pain of various sorts. Although mostly the community was able to keep these happenings hidden from the outside world, at times laypeople visiting the monastery or serving at Mass witnessed some very odd behaviour. At first we had individual sessions with the exorcist, but very soon we started having community sessions. About a dozen and a half sisters actively manifesting, others dealing with obsession or pain...there was no peace, no order, no stability for six months or longer...the Office would sometimes be delayed or sisters miss it so that an "important" session could go on getting nowhere. Then there were sessions during the Office, where

the Office was used as a sort of tool of exorcism. You never knew if you'd have the meal in silence in the refectory or if everyone would get called into the recreation room to eat while the demons manifested and were pumped for information and "tormented." Would there be Grand Silence after Compline or would there be a grand session in the church late into the night?

- A real big problem was the lack of honesty on the part of the superiors in that they blamed everything that they were doing wrong on the first exorcist. Actually, being one of the original "afflicted" sisters and the only one who was conscious during sessions (the other sisters would go unconscious during sessions), I heard and saw a lot that I don't think my superiors realized. I am ninety-nine percent sure that the exorcist was not actually the perpetrator of the wrong way the exorcisms were conducted. I distinctly remember on many occasions that he seemed to disagree with what MA was pushing him to do during sessions and said he didn't think that was safe. Eventually she seemed to persuade him that ours was "a special case" that didn't have to follow the normal rules for exorcisms, and that she had special authority as an abbess; and he went along with it. For example, the first dozen or so sessions that I had with him, he told me to fight to keep control and to follow the prayers; I didn't have any actual manifestations, but would just feel sleepy or confused, or shaky and sick. Soon I was clear and could get through a session without experiencing any attacks or reactions, and I felt much clearer and stronger to resist attacks throughout the day. He said that I didn't need any more sessions, that whatever was left was just oppression, and with prayer and perseverance it would probably eventually clear up. Mother Abbess and Sr. Scholastica didn't agree: they said that I was "one of the worst," and that it couldn't be that easy, that the demon must be hiding deep in my psychology, and it was my pride and wounds that were keeping it from manifesting. They convinced him to keep going, and started telling me to push forward the demon, dig down in my interior and find out what hooks it was holding onto. Before this point, I had no actual manifestations. Once I started 'pushing forward the demon,' I had manifestations like everyone else...He also didn't like the fact that Mother Abbess wanted to take control of the exorcisms and tell the demons what to do or "send them away." At first he wouldn't even let her in during sessions, and kept her isolated from the rest of the community. Also, we had had an exorcist in Texas even before that, for the sick sisters who were getting treated for mold poisoning there (I was one). Mother Abbess didn't like him, and sent him away pretty soon because he wouldn't do what she wanted him to do. Interestingly, many of the things that she was pushing him to do and that he refused were those that we found out later were wrong, like talking to the demons, pushing them forward, etc. He was an older and obviously much more experienced exorcist.
- What they meant by pushing forward the demon: it was all put in nice complicated phrases, that the demons were hiding deep in our psychology and we needed to push it forward into the light so it could manifest and be pushed out of us. When I actually stopped and thought about what precisely we were doing, what act of will "pushing forward the demon" entailed, it was basically telling the demon "yes, you can have control." The reasoning being that only if it is in control and actively manifesting can one perform an effective exorcism and send it away. And the more crazily it manifests and

the worse it reacts to the exorcism, the madder it is and the closer to leaving it must be. I instinctively recoiled from doing it without being able to explain why, even to myself at first. But I was basically told that because I didn't react to the exorcisms and have active manifestations like the other sisters, the demon must have deep hooks in me, since it was so "deep down" that it "wouldn't manifest." This was because I was proud and didn't want to admit that I had a deep problem; I thought I was better than the other sisters and I didn't want to let go of control. I was put under obedience to do it, and I did, ignoring my instinctive misgivings. Everyone else was doing it, and I was the only sick sister who didn't have active manifestations, so I figured I must be doing something wrong. After a dozen or so sessions, I really started thinking about what we were doing: it just felt so wrong. But I was again put under obedience, and I figured, even if something is wrong, holy obedience will keep me safe. However, it wasn't long before I really started losing control, not just during sessions. Emotionally, psychologically, in my thoughts, and in my behaviour, I was being controlled more and more by the demonic. My will was getting weaker to the point where I was really scared, and I could find no peace interiorly. I was hurting others, causing pain to the community, and I felt like I was being torn apart inside for hours by the demon after each session. I would collapse mentally and emotionally and just sit there weeping, and they said I was looking for attention and making it up or that I had emotional problems. I saw the same happening to other sisters, and I began to be very afraid. Very timidly, I tried to communicate to my superiors that something felt really wrong and I didn't think I should keep doing this. But that was pride. I was deceived by the devil and shouldn't trust my feelings: did I think I knew better than my superiors and the exorcist? I was told that if I didn't do it I wouldn't be making vows, since clearly I didn't have enough willpower to be obedient. (I was already voted in and was supposed to make vows with my class in just a few weeks.) Further, I was told that the exorcists were about to give up on me because I wouldn't take responsibility for my actions. I was confused as to how I could be under obedience to tell the demon it could take control, and at the same time be held to account for my actions after it took control. Every time I claimed responsibility as I was told to, the manifestations got proportionately worse and out of control. From that point I steadily broke down, making it impossible to make valid vows; and was eventually sent home to reset. I did recover a lot, especially after talking to a priest who said I shouldn't take responsibility for attacks as that was appropriation and actually gave them hooks. In this way I slowly fought out of it to the point where I no longer had manifestations and had a lot more control emotionally. Then I entered Ava. I had a lot of questions about obedience which I knew needed to be answered before I could make vows. I asked the superior in Ava if I ought to have obeyed when the exorcist told us to push forward the demon or if I could have refused, since it felt so wrong and had such bad consequences. I couldn't understand how obedience could be used in such a way that one became more a slave to the devil and one's passions, whereas obedience was meant to free us from both so that we can give ourselves to God. I felt that by trusting my superiors and surrendering myself to them I had been surrendered to the devil instead of to God. I asked, isn't obedience a means and not an end in itself? If the end of obedience had been frustrated in this situation, wasn't there something wrong with the way obedience was being looked at: weren't we

treating it as an end in itself? She answered that I should have obeyed, and that even though it turned out to be a dangerous thing after all, that the sisters who obeyed and trusted were protected from getting possessed and much good came out of all that suffering. I wasn't satisfied with this answer, and I felt like she just kept beating around the bush and not directly answering my questions. She said I was thinking of obedience and trust on too much of a natural level, and not enough supernaturally - that supernatural faith saw the good in obeying even under hard circumstances. I still didn't feel like my conscience was at rest, and I had the inspiration to ask Sr. Stephen, an old sister who had recently transferred to the community, her ideas about obedience, without letting on why I was asking. I figured she must have some rules of discernment about when to obey and when not to, since her former community went downhill fast after Vatican II. How did she know what to go along with and when to say, no, I'm not giving up the habit, etc.? She gave me three rules of discernment of when to obey and when not to obey, which I had never heard taught in my whole novitiate, and which lined up with what I had learned in Catholic morality growing up, about when to obey one's parents or not. The criteria were: a.) Is the action itself objectively morally good, bad, or indifferent? If it is a mortal sin, for example, you can't do it regardless. If it is a good or indifferent action then move onto the other criterion. b.) What are the circumstances? What will be the consequences or effects? Maybe the action itself is good or indifferent but the circumstances might make it immoral. The good effect of the action has to always outweigh any bad effects, and it must always be a choice for the good, even if bad consequences follow as side results. c.) What are the intentions? What are my superior's intentions? What are mine in obeying? Good intentions don't necessarily make an action good, and bad intentions can make an action immoral even if the circumstances and the act objectively are both good. Applying this to what had happened with the exorcist, I realized that the act itself was bad - letting a demon have control. The effects and consequences were certainly very bad - sacrilege, disruption, all the turmoil and evil, hurt and trauma that came out of letting the demons do what they wanted. The only criterion that passed was that everyone, as far as I could tell, had good intentions - the exorcist, the superiors, and the sisters. I brought this conversation to my superior, and she said that she couldn't trust that Sr. Stephen had really said all that, since I was known to see everything through my own jaded perceptions and couldn't be trusted to see reality. And this despite the fact that she could have literally walked two doors down the hall, knocked on Sr. Stephen's cell door, and checked with her. I knew then that the truth didn't matter; she wasn't open to the possibility that there was something wrong with the way obedience was understood within the community. This was when I asked to talk to a priest: I felt that in conscience I had to leave, but I was afraid of being blinded by my pride and making the wrong decision after all, losing my vocation in the process. I was told, however, that I couldn't talk to a priest, as "we don't want to bring anyone into this; you need to make a decision now, either to trust the community and your superiors, giving up your own pride and judgement, or else to leave." Then MMJ read an email from Mother Abbess (I have included a copy below) to me, and asked what my decision was. I decided to leave. A few days later, still in turmoil because I wasn't sure I had done the right thing, I remembered reading once in canon

law something about having a right to talk to a priest in matters of conscience. I looked it up, found that it was so, and wrote a note to my superior, again requesting to speak to a priest, as I had a right under canon law to do so. The day I left she arranged for a priest to come, and he put me at peace, saying that if I didn't feel like I could trust the community I didn't have to feel guilty about leaving; that would be the normal thing to do.

- Not only the exorcist conducted the exorcisms; often we would have sessions without him, with Mother Abbess and Sr. Scholastica mostly conducting, asking the demons questions about all sorts of things, like which cardinals were on their side, whether there was masonic stuff going on in the Vatican, whether individual sisters had done such and such or were being attacked for this reason or that..whether the triumph of the Immaculate Heart was coming, whether the next pope would be good, whether Pope Francis would convert before he died, whether any of us would be martyrs. We were told we were the most important monastery in the whole world, the only thing holding the demons back from taking over the Church, and that was why they were attacking us...that we would have some of the highest places in heaven because we were Mary's Benedictines...that we would have convents all over the world...that many of us would be superiors someday and so that's why we needed to learn and deeply practice obedience now, because you can't be a good superior if you don't know how to obey. MA and the superiors seemed to take this all quite seriously. Even a year later, after I entered Ava, she gave an exhortation telling us that our being obedient and loving brides of Christ would be what would save the Church...that the Church depends on us and our fiat as traditional contemplatives...if we fail the Church is going to be in a sorry state.
- Another weird thing we started doing was "drawing" the demons out of certain sisters into others who were considered easier exits. MA many times "drew" the demons out of sisters into herself so that she could do battle with them and make them leave, especially when the sister in question "had a weak will" or "wasn't fighting."
- Yes a number of the sisters, even before the demonic outbreak, have had visions or supernatural experiences. Sister Scholastica had a number of visions in her sleep where she heard Sr. Wilhelmina tell her what treatment various sisters needed in order to be healed from the strange sicknesses they were dealing with. Sr. Josephine also regularly sees visions of the saints and angels or Our Lord, especially when she is really sick. About a year after I entered MA started having supernatural experiences of some sort- she sat down one day during the Office and seemed unresponsive. Later she told us she had a great experience of God's love and that things like this had been happening for a while now. She said Our Lord wanted her to tell us that this was happening. She said that she had been in great darkness for like 7 years I think and that prayer had been so hard but now she knew it was all worth it, we should never give up praying because God will come to us in the end. She talked for hours with SS about it, apologizing that she and SS were unavailable for much of the day for a week or two. SS's verdict was that it was genuine but that God seemed to be dealing with her in an unusual way. Whatever happens seems to happen in her bed a lot, which I thought was kind of weird. In fact, one day when Mother Abbess and SS had conducted a private exorcism over me in her room and I collapsed on the floor in a state of complete disassociation and exhaustion, the two of them looked at each other with a despairing look. MA said, "should I?" to SS,

who replied, "Why not?" Then MA went into her bed "to pray" while SS sat in a chair staring down at me. When MA came out she had that aura that she had whenever a supernatural experience had happened. I don't know why, but I always felt disgusted when she talked about her union with her bridegroom. I think partially because it seemed like such a private thing that shouldn't just be shared with the whole community. Some sisters said she hears Our Lord's voice audibly and sees visions; she definitely said she hears Him speak to her a lot and tell her what to do, especially how to deal with individual sisters. Looking back, this really bothers me now because a lot of the things she said Our Lord wanted us to do were very wrong, such as pushing forward the demon, blaming ourselves for the demonic manifestations we had, etc. She also began saying things like, "I know Sr. so and so has a vocation," or act like she could read her soul. I really don't believe that could be Our Lord speaking to her. Another thing was that I would be struggling with a temptation interiorly and almost at the same time she would say something that confirmed the temptation. For example, I would have a strong temptation to think I was crazy, worthless, unchangeable, so proud that I could never change, I was just bad. I would at times even feel guilty for existing. And then, she would say the exact same thing, sometimes personally, other times through chapter talks generally. It was really devastating, because here Our Lord is saying through her the same thing that this interior voice which was leading me to despair and turmoil was saying.

- Once one of the solemn professed, Sr. Misericordia, told me she had a special grace from God as my sister to be able to read my soul and she could see I was being prideful and disobedient and that I was wrong...She asked MAs permission to talk to me because she was disturbed at my behaviour and thought she could talk some sense into me. Sr. Misericordia, during my postulancy and aspirancy, had always struck me as a jolly, happy-go-lucky, joyful sister. During the demonic attacks and after, I became very afraid of this sister, because in her interactions with the afflicted sisters, she was so cold-hearted. She didn't seem to see how much they were suffering, and she could cut so deep verbally.
- Some of the afflicted sisters had visions during the demonic outbreak as well; I'm not sure if they still do. I never experienced this. One of the other afflicted sisters, Sr. Laetiana, asked me at one point if I had visions; she felt disappointed and wondered why she didn't. I said no, and I'm sure glad I don't. It bothered me how much attention and credibility was given to these visions, especially when they were so clearly connected with the diabolic aspect. Oftentimes the whole community was gathered when a sister was having a vision and we could ask her questions while everyone listened awestruck. Three sisters in particular, Sr. Jacinta, Sr. Marie-Therese, and Sr. Maria Jacoba, were considered the counterparts and sort of the fulfillment of the three visionaries at Fatima...Then other sisters started seeing visions too. I was like, no way, I don't want any of this. I was disturbed that no one else seemed to see how dangerous this could be and instead it seemed to be encouraged.
- The secrecy also about the demonic stuff; you weren't allowed to talk to your families or each other about it. They weren't telling the new people who joined or the people who were visiting what happened. MMJ in Ava told me: "We don't talk about the demonic

stuff. The postulants don't know anything about it except that there was an attack and we are alright now. They haven't asked any questions, they're just in love with Benedictine life now, and I think that is good." I was thinking, that's good? That they don't know and don't want to know? That they could be joining a community where they might get possessed one day? What if I were dating a guy in the world and he never told me that he had something like this until after we were married?!! There is something wrong about that. This is not real discernment if they are not being told the whole truth about who we are as a community and our struggles like that. So many times I wanted to go up to the aspirants or candidates that were so in love with the false picture they were being given and say: "Get out of here! Something is really wrong! They are hiding things from you!"

- SS told me once during the demonic era that "Jesus isn't pleased by the way you are praying." When I begged her to tell me then how I should pray, she didn't answer.
- They also on several occasions lied to me in order to get me to do what they wanted during exorcisms. For example, Sister Scholastica told me that Sister Tarcisia had just started taking responsibility for her demonic outbreaks and she was doing "so much better now, especially in choir." A day or so later I found out that that was the first of many days Sister Tarcisia wasn't able to make it to choir because the reaction was so violent.
- Another thing during the demonic era; there was a big emphasis on making public confessions to the community, each sister confessing what she had done which might have given power to the demons. These were not voluntary and spontaneous - the whole community was involved, even the postulants. One of these public confessions broke my trust in the community and individual sisters severely because it showed there was so much fear and distrust. The novice mistress and prioress confessed a great fear of suffering which led to trying to avoid it at any cost both for herself and for others, which actually caused more suffering. Actually this was kind of common knowledge already, that her actions were really dominated by fear; she struggled so much with fear of suffering and what other people thought. Sisters confessed doubting that sick sisters were actually sick and not looking for attention. Others confessed a lack of trust in superiors, critical behaviour, grumbling. Sisters that I thought were stable and trustworthy confessed giving in to doubt or fear or lack of trust in others...There were many things I learned which I wished and felt that I ought never to have known. I felt like I was being let into their interior forums when I had no right to be there and it wasn't a spontaneous confession. And I felt interiorly violated myself, like others saw what was most private and sacred inside. This feeling happened many times, especially when I was told to try to find the demon deep down in my psychology and be more open about what was going on inside, or when the demon started talking about my interior. Especially then, because it would twist everything around so that there was nothing good left. I felt like everything that I believed in, that was sacred and true and beautiful that I held onto, was dragged out into the open and displayed, twisted and mocked by the demon and denied or scoffed at by my superiors.
- Sister Tarcisia was made during the demonic time to make a public confession to all the community. She was sobbing and shaking, holding onto Mother Abbess, and then all the sisters one by one came to give her a hug. Most of the sisters didn't say anything and

just went on to the Office: as I hugged her I whispered something like “pray for me, sister.” MA looked at me suspiciously, because I was being ‘odd and singular’ by not being silent like everyone else.

- During the demonic attacks, there was a real lack of chastity on a number of levels which really traumatized me. On a physical level, there was a lot of physical contact that made me feel uncomfortable or, worse, was pleasing in a twisted way and made me struggle with immodest thoughts. Just the way sisters were handled while sessions went on felt immodest. Sisters would lay on top of other sisters to hold them down. The demons said they hated when the sisters hugged each other because it showed their love. As a result, in order to “torture them more” there was a lot of close hugging etc. during some sessions I was in. One time MA and SS sat close up on either side of me, so that I was squished between them, and one of them put their veil across me, the other held my hand, and they made the sign of the cross in different places on my body during the exorcism. Mother Abbess focused especially on my breast, pressing me hard over and over again. Another time MA hugged me for a long time fiercely. Another time she came after Communion and breathed on my face over and over, saying that the demon hated the breath because Jesus was in her.
- On a less physical level, I felt like there was a lot of emotional and spiritual immodesty; things about sisters that should have been kept private were publicized or made common knowledge. It made one feel disgusting. For example, MA and SS, during a private exorcism with me, would mention the failings or struggles of other sisters nonchalantly and with a total lack of charity, in a cold, dissecting way..
- One night before Compline, most of the sisters were sent into the church to pray while about seven of us plus SS and MA went into the chapter room and started a session. I was the only “afflicted” sister who was conscious during sessions, so I heard and saw a lot of things that only MA and SS know about. I think they didn’t know that at first. The session consisted of the afflicted nuns wrestling or manifesting on the floor while SS held down the most violent with a sword (they got two from the Redemptorists I think, as knights of Our Lady or something? More about that below.). MA stood on her throne and banged her crozier on the floor over and over while shouting at the demons to leave, poking the crozier at times into the sister’s stomach. She was so angry, it was traumatizing. I don’t think I have ever seen anyone that angry before, and I have some family members that struggle with anger. I don’t know if she realized I was conscious or not. A part of her crozier broke off because she was banging it so hard...
- Mother Abbess and Sr. Scholastica received swords and rosaries from the Redemptorists in some sort of ceremony where they became knights of our lady, it was really secretive and I don’t think any of the sisters went with them, and they didn’t tell us much about what happened exactly.
- Near the end of my time in Gower and after we were told the demonic was gone, I went to my novice mistress, SS, and said I was still really struggling and I needed help. She said angrily and with disgust, “Sister! Help yourself!”
- I and at least one other sister that I know of - Sr. Marie Agnes - both asked to leave during the demonic blow-up. Both of us were told, no, you are not yourself, the demon is controlling you and you are not going home. "Of course Sister Maryam Gertrude doesn't

want to leave; we all know that, don't we. So you demon can give up your tricks." Sister Marie Agnes is professed now.

- Sister Scholastica would often during the demonic outbreak verbally beat me down especially while the demon was manifesting. After one of these times, I came crying into her office later in the day and begged her to tell me what I should do to change for the better. She said that she was sorry for speaking to me that way earlier, and said: "I don't know why it bothered me so much." Not many days later she spoke to me in the same way...
- Yes, Mother Abbess was one of the demonically afflicted; in fact she's the only one as far as I know who, in the beginning, they said possibly might have been possessed. She was the only one as far as I know who had some things like throwing up orange mucus that stank like sulphur, and her manifestations seemed more realistic, etc. There seemed to be some sort of connection between her and the other afflicted sisters; when a sister was being exorcised, MA would start manifesting, and the demons "confessed" that the reason they were attacking the community was because they hated her, her union with Christ, and she was so holy. Supposedly there were seven devils that left with the orange mucus: hatred, pride, anger, envy, gluttony, sloth, disobedience, defiance, or something like that. In later manifestations it seemed to be mostly hopelessness, which she still seems to be struggling with.
- Sisters who were manifesting were often tied down to a mattress or a pillar in the church overnight; this was done to me and to at least three other sisters. Sister Maria Jacoba, Sr. Laetiana, Sr. Marie Agnes. Oftentimes Matins would be prayed while they were still lying there in their night dress.
- Sr. Laetiana once was strapped down in a straight jacket to a mattress so that she couldn't move, a gag stuffed into her mouth, and a sheet laid over her, down in the public sewing room while the sisters were working. Sr. Misericordia was the main one tying her down, and the angry and cold-hearted way she did it was terrible to see. Looking on, I could see that Sr. Laetiana was suffering so much, and that she just needed to be loved in that moment. I remember being terrified, both for her sake, and even more that that would happen to me. I think I would have lost my mind from terror if that had happened to me.
- Sr. Laetiana, at recreation one day during the demonic era, laughingly mentioned that Mother Abbess had spanked her to get the demon out. Mother Abbess overheard this, and made it sound like a good joke, saying something like, "Yeah, now I'm giving out spankings like a mom in the world! Anyone else want one?"
- Another time Mother Abbess told SS to stuff a dirty sock into a manifesting sister's mouth because she didn't like the sounds the demon was making. I thought to myself, sure the demon is manifesting, but that is my sister's body they are disrespecting and treating that way.
- Sisters tried many times to run away from the monastery, even before the demonic was "discovered." Usually they were found before getting very far, although one night I probably got a mile off the monastery before being terrified by the wolves and running back in. Other sisters were sometimes missing for hours and found huddled up in the woods, etc.

- Many sisters were also suicidal; including myself. Some tried strangling themselves, others couldn't be left alone with a knife, and so on. This was, of course, blamed on the demonic and called a demonic manifestation.
- Sisters were often blamed and made to take responsibility for supposedly giving the demons power to attack other sisters and "make them" run away or hit sisters. Once, after I had run away and been brought back to the monastery, SS came to tell me that it was my fault that Sr. Josephine had broken Sr. Grace's nose last night, since my act of giving into the demons by running away had given them more power over Sr. Josephine.
- To me it seems like most of the "demonic" is actually psychological, speaking not only from my own experience of the demonic but also from watching the other sisters... Basically you are under so much stress in there that you start breaking down. They either say, you have emotional problems, or you are sick, or this is demonic - because they can't face the fact that it is actually the atmosphere in the community. MA is the only one I could believe actually manifested real demonic stuff. Not that some of the other stuff was demonic, but I don't think they could have taken off with the situation the way they did if the emotional and psychological atmosphere had been healthy. The methods that actually changed things were psychological; the exorcisms did nothing to change things. And now things are "better" because sisters are repressing everything and forcing themselves to act normal and not break down. I know, partially because that is what I was doing, and also from things other sisters would say, about having to try so hard and put everything into it. And every once in a while someone breaks and then they're brow beaten into making a harder effort. It is a real volcano waiting to happen because at some point the tension is just going to erupt.
- Since the demonic stuff they have been really strict about letting sisters sleep in or have exceptions or treating them if they complain of sickness. Because "that is how the demons get in, that is their attack, to make sisters sick so they can't come to the Office and can't be united with their sisters." I kept thinking, so you can't be united with your sisters unless you're physically present? How about union in spirit, union of heart? Can't you be present in body and absent in mind, disunited in heart? Aren't we that way? Physically together in the same place, doing the same things, but spiritually and emotionally so far apart, so isolated.
- The first exorcist at Gower was Fr. S██████ a new and inexperienced exorcist from Fr. Ripperger's community. The second exorcist, who supposedly cleared out the demons, was Fr. M██████ from the Transalpine Redemptorists. Fr. H██████ on a number of occasions went up with Mother Abbess after Compline into Sr. Josephine's bedroom at night, allegedly to perform exorcisms. We also had some community exorcisms after dark out of doors.
- Mother Abbess frequently entered Sr. Josephine's bedroom at night, where 2 other sisters, Sr. Grace, and Sr. Marie Bernard, Sr. Josephine's caretakers, also slept.
- The way that Sr. Wilhelmina was discovered to be incorrupt: for a while she was invoked during exorcisms as one of the 'big guns.' We even had some sessions on her grave; for example, I was exorcised once while lying on top of her grave; and we had some community sessions also out there. We had one after dark, with the whole community and the exorcist. The demons talked a lot about how they hated her so much, etc., and

sisters who had visions many times saw her. Then one morning during chapter, MA said: "So, I think it's high time we dug out the treasure we have buried in our yard..." and immediately a bunch of the demons screamed out "Nooooo! No, no! Not a good idea, not a good idea!" To which MA laughed and said, "Ok, I guess that's our answer!" (If the demons said something wasn't a good idea, we always did it. Which was stupid because then they would purposely say 'don't do' something that they *did* want us to do.) So then we dug her up, amidst the protestations of the demons. We all thought she would be incorrupt, and the demons said so too, so it wasn't a huge surprise when she was found. Then, when we installed her in the church: her family was invited, and apparently they are really deep in witchcraft. One of her brothers I think is a high priest? Anyway, the demons told us they were planning to curse the body so that the faithful who came to venerate her would get a curse instead of a blessing. So the community was warned that we would have to do spiritual battle and they wouldn't let the family be alone with the body. During the procession, one of the family tried to "pray" a curse, and when MA stopped him she started having a demonic attack. Then, supposedly the flowers the family put on the body were cursed, and the exorcist had to take them away and burn them afterwards. After this, MA said that some of the sisters, particularly Sr. Marie Agnes, were being affected by the curse...

- The Vatican as well as our local bishop both requested that the community keep Sr. Wilhelmina more private; they were not happy with the way Sr. Wilhelmina was publicly processed into the church, and the thousands of pilgrims she was attracting without being approved by the Church. Mother Abbess, when she told the community about this, remarked: "You know what, they can't do anything to us. You know why? Because she's black! If they try to persecute or shut us down, they'll be accused of being racist." She was triumphant.
- The superiors blatantly lied to me and my parents after I left Gower. We called Sr. Scholastica after I had been home a couple months to check in and see if they thought I was ready to enter Ava. My parents asked her if the demonic stuff had stopped now, and she said, yes, other than just normal temptations in the thoughts. I found out after I entered Ava that that was just not true. Sr. Josephine for one never stopped being attacked. Another newer sister, Sr. Rosaria, who hadn't struggled originally, started manifesting. Other sisters were shaking so hard they had to leave choir, etc. Mother Abbess was still having attacks. And I got the impression that they still weren't being completely honest, like it was actually worse than they were letting on.
- There was a great difference between Gower and Ava that really struck me: during my time at Gower I had learned not to ask questions or bring up concerns to my novice mistress; because she would simply shut me down. There was no question of having questions. I was trained to think that was just what religious life was like. Mother Mary Josefa, however, invited questions and really seemed to try her best to answer them and help me to trust. She would express surprise if she found out I was struggling with something and hadn't told her. She wanted me to keep her very up to date on how I was feeling, how my health was, what I was struggling with. This was very shocking and counter-intuitive for me after being at Gower for three years, where I was very strongly discouraged and even punished for bringing up such things. She also meets very

frequently with the novitiate and is very much more available to the community than the superiors at Gower.

- A novice, Sr. Ellassara, (who actually just made vows) asked me once while I was at Ava whether I felt like the demonic situation in Gower and the obedience we had given to the exorcist and the superiors had been a good thing. She said she felt like the suffering she had gone through had damaged her and she couldn't understand how other sisters said it was so purifying and made them grow so much. I felt like it would have been wrong to let her know too much of my own doubts and struggles in this area and said I did think it was purifying in many ways...but that I was still really struggling with trust...
- I found out, while I was at Ava, that MMJ reported to the superiors at Gower parts of the confidential conversations that I had with her, without my consent or knowledge. Near the end of my stay in Ava, MMJ told me that she had been telling MA everything that we had been talking about, and that MA knew therefore that I was still struggling with trust and obedience.
- When I told MMJ at Ava that I was struggling with obedience and trusting the community after what I had seen, she told me something that happened in her novitiate in the hopes that it would help me to trust. She entered a few months before the former superior was removed and saw that something was really wrong but was told by the other sisters that nothing was wrong. A few months later, when the superior was removed, all of a sudden everyone said, yeah, that was wrong. This broke her trust because the community had basically lied to her, and she didn't feel like she could trust the formation. If they said that was alright and it wasn't, how could she trust that what they told her now was true? She struggled with these doubts and questions for a while and kept bringing it up to her novice mistress. Finally she said she went to MA and said she was struggling with her prayer life and didn't know why. Mother Abbess looked at her and said, "are you happy here?" MMJ said she looked out the window behind MA and thought about it. She knew that she could just call her parents and say, I'm coming home, and that could be the end of it, that would be the end of her ever being a Benedictine of Mary. However, she said, she decided that there was something in staying and being a Benedictine of Mary that was worth sacrificing for. She saw that she was unhappy because she was criticising the superiors and because of her own pride. She made the decision to stay, apologized for being critical, and made that act of trust. This story quieted my doubts for a while, but then thinking about it later, I began to ask myself, "is she really happy now because of that decision? Is she really deeply at peace with that decision and know that she did the right thing? Is she a better person because of it?" I found that I couldn't honestly say that she was a very happy person or that I wanted to be like her; not that I didn't love her or admire certain virtues and strong points in her, but I didn't sense that she was more fully herself for that decision. In fact, I got the sense that she was conflicted. I was surprised at the anger that flashed across her face and the lack of peace she seemed to feel whenever I brought up an area where I felt unable to trust, or said something that implicitly questioned the community or a superior's decision. It was like I was touching something that she was sensitive about and didn't want to face. It was like she was angry and frustrated because she didn't have a believable answer for my questions about trust and obedience, and kept beating around the bush, and we both knew it. My

questions about trust and obedience and what had happened at Gower questioned her own decision to stay, and so it was like she felt my questions personally. I just can't explain otherwise why my struggles and doubts upset her so much; I was just a novice, after all - her emotional stability shouldn't have been so dependent on my behaviour, even if I was behaving badly.

- During this time at Ava, I had several conversations with the superior, MMJ, in which I said that I felt like it wasn't working, I just wasn't fitting. Once I said that I felt that I needed more emotional stability than the community was able to give and I wondered if that was a sign that my vocation might be elsewhere. I felt like I just wasn't strong enough for the emotional atmosphere within the community, like maybe I was called somewhere else that wasn't as strict and that had deeper roots in formation. The superior replied that there was nothing wrong with the community, and that the problem was in myself. She kept telling me to pray and wait and not hastily decide to leave, especially if my decision to leave was based on problems I thought I saw in the community, which she said did not exist. However, I still continued to struggle trusting the community and the formation we were receiving. After one of these conversations, MMJ gave the community a chapter talk in which she said that, "as Mother Abbess often reminds us," we have to be careful about judging the community and being critical. Most of the time we are just over-reacting, or seeing things through our own prejudices. However, she went on to say, sometimes it may really become necessary to leave: giving the example of a monk and friend of the community who had to leave his community and transfer to another because "he couldn't be sure that the monk next to him in choir wasn't desiring him unnaturally." She said that usually that's not going to happen, and it's a pretty extreme example, *but* that it is possible. She said that in such a case, if we really feel like we have to leave such a situation, it shouldn't be a sort of "giving up on monastic life." She also repeated the same phrase to me in a private conversation later, in which she said that there is nothing wrong with our community and I was overreacting *but* even if my concerns were valid, I shouldn't just give up on monastic life or say that there is something wrong with monastic life in itself. She also said several times that "the Rule still works. There *are* guidelines and safety measures in place. The superior can't command anything that is outside of God's law, Church law, or the constitutions. Even if there are crisis in the future - individually or as a community, it will be good, God will bring good out of it. There are those protecting measures put in place; even St. Benedict puts it into the Rule, and the Church has visitations of religious communities: so that when abuses occur, the superiors can be removed if needed. The Rule still works: remember what happened in 2010: the abusive superior was removed, and the community was able to move on."
- During one of the meetings I had at this time with MMJ, and after some monks from Clear Creek Abbey had stayed at the monastery in Ava, I mentioned that the monks seemed to be so emotionally mature and so themselves, and that I wanted to be a religious like that. MMJ said that I would be surprised to know how frustrated they really felt inside and within their community. She also said that the kind of emotional maturity and freedom that we are seeking as religious is not the kind that a psychologist in the world would advocate. A psychologist would only look at it from a natural level, and

wouldn't understand the need for humility etc. They would say things like, you need to have self-respect and self-love, and a whole host of other things that in religious life we give up on a natural level because the supernatural level is higher.

- When I mentioned during a conversation with MMJ that being home with my family in the year between my time in Gower and my entrance into Ava had been such a blessing and had helped me grow in many ways, she expressed surprise. She said that "That's not what MA and SS told me. They said that you kept writing to them the contrary, saying that there were problems in your family and you didn't belong in the world and you just needed to get back into the monastery as soon as possible, and being home was a negative experience. Now you are telling me the opposite: which one is it? Once again I see that you are twisting the truth according to the effect you want to produce." I was taken aback, first that the superiors in Gower had received such a negative impression from my letters. Then I began to wonder if maybe I had written such stuff, and tried to remember what I said. I responded to MMJ that "I mean, I know I wrote them that I had talked to a psychologist and discovered that there were some issues in my family, and that maybe that was part of the reason I struggled emotionally. Also that I couldn't wait to enter the monastery again because I felt so strongly that I had a vocation and I missed the life. That's true. But I'm pretty sure I also said lots of positive things: I know I said that I was making progress out of depression and fighting through the demonic manifestations, and that my health was improving. And it seems to me that things aren't just black and white anyway. It's not like my being home was either bad or good: there were both. So sometimes I mentioned the 'bad' things when I felt my superiors ought to know, and at other times I talk about the 'good' ones." MMJ responded by saying that she thought I was very critical of my parents, and that I was continuing in this pattern by criticising the community. She said that the answers I had given in the written questionnaire (which the candidates are given) after entering Ava about my family had been critical. I didn't know what to say, although I kept thinking, "What, should I have lied and said my family was perfect? No family is perfect, and that's normal. It seems to me that there isn't a conflict between being honest about other people's limitations and at the same time honoring them and being grateful for what was good." Certainly I didn't have an attitude of anger or resentment or unforgiveness to my parents: on the contrary, there was gratitude for what they did do. On top of that, I was confused because while I was in Gower the superiors had many times implicitly criticised my family, to the point where I felt defensive for my family; and now I was being accused of doing the attacking.
- MMJ during a chapter talk, quoted Mother Mary Francis, saying "She says, *fiercely loyal* to our sisters. That is an important quality; to be loyal to our sisters..."
- MMJ told me "I can see that you love the life, that's very clear. But I don't at all get the impression you love the community."
- MMJ also told me, "Expect your superior to treat you like dust, and you won't be surprised at corrections, etc."
- When I told MMJ that I felt like there was a conflict between obedience and the truth in my mind, after what had happened at Gower, and that I could not for the life of me find a way to reconcile the two, she was angry. She said "Never say that. There is never a

conflict between obedience and truth.” She said the problem lay in my false conception of the truth.

- Several times I brought up things that had happened at Gower to MMJ, saying they really bothered me and I couldn’t ignore the unease that they caused. For example, I told her about SGr yelling at Mother Abbess in her office, or the times I had seen sisters express so much frustration and fear, etc. She was taken aback by some of these things I said I had witnessed. She said that she knew SGr very well and she knew she and MA had a very good relationship, that SGr was very obedient, and she had no idea why SGr would have acted that way. In the end, she said she couldn’t trust me to be remembering correctly and that I was probably seeing things all out of proportion, there *must* have been a plausible explanation. But I could see she wasn’t sure. Other situations I witnessed she said were just momentary weaknesses shown by sisters under stress. When I described some of these situations in detail and she could not find a way to explain them, she said that since she had not been there and seen for herself what had happened that she couldn’t give a definite decision but it was safe to assume that I had simply seen things way out of proportion.
- Once I asked MMJ if it was normal for people, after leaving a convent, to struggle so much mentally and emotionally, referring to several different young women I had known in the world who left Gower struggling with strange mental problems. She said that the fault must have been with their families, it certainly could not have been the fault of their having been in the convent. She said that some of them simply were bitter, and that others had been unstable before and entering the convent simply brought it to the light.
- I was also again told at Ava to take responsibility for attacks, including the damage I had done at Gower. I tried to explain that that had always caused me to lose control and that by doing the opposite I had regained freedom; but was told I was again being disobedient, untrusting, and prideful, thinking I knew better. I mentioned also that a priest I had talked to while I was home had said that one shouldn’t take responsibility for attacks because that was appropriation and actually gave the demon a hook to keep attacking. But I was told I must have misunderstood him or interpreted what he said through my perceptions, or was simply misremembering. All the other sisters got better by taking responsibility and apologizing for their manifestations. I obeyed but once again the attacks started gaining control; and was told this must be because I wasn’t really obeying and taking the advice I was given.
- After the demonic era had quieted down, many sisters really struggled with PTSD and disturbing memories of what had happened. We were told not to think about that time, to try to forget it, to realize the good and the purification that came out of it, and then to move on. Several sisters who were still struggling with thoughts and with demonic temptations kept asking the superiors for help, as MA mentioned in a chapter talk that she sent to all the houses. She said, no. You don’t need help: other people can’t do your work for you. We learned that with the exorcists. Each of us has to work on our own problems, and we are not going to look for more help from outside.
- Not long before I left Ava, the superiors at Gower told us that among the candidates who would be entering that fall were two former sisters. One was Veronica Perts, who had formerly been a novice. The other, whose name I don’t remember, was much older, I

would guess in her forties; she had left the community in 2010 or 2011, right after the former superior was removed, and I think had been first professed. In any case, the superiors at Gower told us that this former sister had approached MA, asking to become an oblate. MA had said, instead, that she should consider entering the community again; that it had been many years since her last try and perhaps it was time; much had changed since then. The former sister, we were told, was planning to enter Evansville; in the end she must have changed her mind and decided not to, because we never heard anything about her after that. To me it seemed strange that MA would suggest that the former sister re-enter, rather than leaving it to the latter's initiative.

- I was accused of emotional blackmailing when I told my superior in Ava that when I tried to eat more I started losing weight, getting sick, and losing control of my emotions. Looking back, I am pretty sure now that I had an infection which has been scientifically proved to cause mental and emotional problems and which is worsened by over-eating, snacking, or even eating a lot of sugar and junk food (which they do- some days we had desert or treats four times a day). It is also a scientific fact that snacking in between meals actually can cause weight loss because it speeds up the body's metabolism. Interesting to note, the superior in Ava said that a lot of the sisters have been saying the same thing, that they lose weight when they eat more, and the superiors are sick of hearing it. A lot of sisters are under obedience to eat more "because they are losing weight," and a lot of sisters are sick. I was told that I was too skinny, and that it was painful for the superiors to look at me.
- I was also told it was emotional blackmail to say that the way they instructed me to deal with demonic attacks made me worse.
- I noticed while I was in Ava that the sub prioress, Sr. Sophia, would often come out of the superior's office crying and that she really seemed to struggle emotionally a lot. One day, while I was cleaning the floors, I found a note which I read. It was a note from Mother Mary Josefa to Sr. Sophia that went along the lines of "I'm sorry for venting my frustration yesterday. I know you have a lot of work and responsibilities and that can be stressful. Please don't come into my office any more in the mornings because it's been turning into a kind of recreation for both of us and wasting time. I'm grateful that you are trying to help relieve my work load but when I give you some work you just start crying. Please tomorrow just go straight to work and don't come to my office." I was surprised at the frustration and it just seemed odd to me. Later that day the superior asked her sub prioress to take charge of a recreation and added "Can I trust you to do that?" in a meaningful way. Watching Sr. Sophia's face, I could tell she was hurt but was hiding it beneath a mask and a smile. Later I asked MMJ whether she and Sr. Sophia had a good relationship, and she said yes, they had an excellent relationship. I asked her then why was she crying so often when she came out of her office? The superior looked surprised that I knew this but just said, you shouldn't assume that just because she's crying it's because she has a problem with me. It's just the way she handles stress. I asked, is that normal? She said, no, not really, and then changed the subject.
- My mom wrote me a letter when I was in Ava talking about narcissism and how we need to set boundaries, etc, and hold onto what we know is true. Much of what she said contradicted what I had just been told by my superior in private conversation. The next

time I met with my superior, I asked her what she thought of my mom's letter, and she twisted everything my mom had said and said, yeah, your mom is saying the exact same thing as I've been telling you this whole time. You need to take responsibility for the thoughts you are being attacked with and your behavior. I was flabbergasted and said, that is not at all what I thought my mom was saying. She said, that is because your perception is jaded and you interpret everything according to your fears and ideas. I said, well, do you want to call her and ask her exactly what she was trying to communicate, because to me what you are saying and what she said are opposites. She said, why? so you can change my mind and the way your superiors handle you? I didn't reply but thought, "yeah, if that is what the truth requires!"

- When I left Ava I was surprised by many of the sisters' parting remarks. Sr. Sophia was clearly very moved that I was leaving and started crying. She gave me a hug, looked me in the eyes, and said, "PRAY FOR US," not at all the kind of reaction I expected, as I was the bad novice leaving because she couldn't swallow her pride. Sister Pauline took me aside and said she was so sorry this was happening, that there was a big misunderstanding, and that the community needed prayers because "this is a small community and it has limitations." I couldn't believe her when she said she had been edified and strengthened by my humility and obedience! After all, I was leaving because I wasn't humble enough, I thought. Another solemn professed sister, sort of the black sheep of the house, Sr. Miriam Esther, said, "yes, you know, my own vocation hasn't been exactly smooth riding." Some sisters seemed really sad and upset that I was leaving, and others were defensive and distant. Several sisters were crying during the Office after I said goodbye. I was puzzled by the way everyone was reacting, although now it makes perfect sense.
- In the last year a lot of the older professed sisters have been moved around from house to house because they "weren't doing well where they were" or "needed to restart" or felt too guilty to live with the sisters who had seen all their "disobedience." One, Sr. Judith Marie, who was at Ava and is now in Evansville, was excommunicated for a while. She kept giving out "help" calls, which I recognized because I had done the same thing so many times before. Like, you feel like something is wrong but you feel too guilty or doubt yourself too much to outright ask someone, is this wrong. Instead you send little "messages" and prods to see if anyone reacts, if anyone else feels the same way you do...I've actually noticed this with a lot of different sisters. Sister Philippa was sent home for a while because, as we were all told "she wasn't being obedient. She was trying to take back some of what she had promised in making vows, and she needed a lot of prayers." Sr. Philippa's final vows have been delayed by the superiors for two years now. Another sister, Sr. Maria Stella, had her vows delayed a year because she wasn't being obedient. Also, when Sr. Philippa's class was voted in for first vows, I remember MA announcing that her two classmates would be making vows, purposely omitting Sr. Philippa, who stood on the sidelines in anguish. If she hadn't been voted in, it meant that she was going to be sent home. Then MA acted like she had just remembered Sr. Philippa, and it was a big joke: "I guess you can make vows, too," she said. Sister Benedicta was recently moved to Illinois as well, from Gower. Her family, many of whom live in Kansas here at my parish, couldn't figure out why she "seemed so relieved and

happy to get out of Gower even though it meant being farther from her family, whom she has always been really close to and really loves spending time with.” Interestingly, external visitations only happen at Gower: MA herself visitates the daughterhouses. This makes it very convenient to send any sisters who might possibly say something during a visitation to the daughterhouses where they will have no such opportunity.

- At this point, I am experiencing a lot of confusion, doubt, and questioning. On a deeper level, the amount of pain and trauma that I carry after my experience is enormous and will likely take many years to process. I have been receiving trauma therapy through a counselor for almost a year now. I also have been blessed with a wonderful spiritual director, Fr. B [REDACTED] a priest of the diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, who has a lot of experience with accompanying victims of abuse, and who said he thinks the place ought to be disbanded as soon as possible.

Copy of the Email Mother Abbess Sent to me at the End of my Time in Ava

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Sub
Date: August 1, 2011
To: [REDACTED] MC

Dear Sister Maryam Gertrude,

Praised be Jesus Christ! I have been keeping abreast of your progress in the monastic life with keen interest, and I have to say, I'm really coming to the end of my rope at this point. The best word I can use to describe your disposition over the past several years is "slippery." And a novice who is still slippery and evasive after almost four years in the community, simply cannot be gotten ahold of for proper formation, inculcating that necessary good of obedience that is demanded in our way of life, spelled out in the Holy Rule. For how can a soul be obedient when she's always telling others what to think, what to do, what is right, what is wrong, especially in how your superiors are to handle you? This you do, Sister! You have a long history of it, with many witnesses!

In the end, you are the mistress of yourself, and no one can reach you. We are not trusted by you because you contradict us, judge us, and are not open to what we have to say, let alone trying to put recommendations into practice. If you cannot relinquish your own ideas and autonomy, the vows are completely pointless. You argue about who trusts whom, but you are responsible only for your own trust, surrendering your own powers. You really never have, and I am wondering if you ever actually can, especially as you've been given so much time and space. It's always something or someone else, but what of your gift of self to God? When will the blame game finally stop? Blaming everyone but yourself: blaming your superiors, blaming their lack of trust in you, blaming the demons, blaming the exorcists, blaming your heart, blaming the circumstances. How are you to be believed? How can your conscience be trusted?

You can advocate the rights of conscience, but you have never given your soul over to being formed, and so it is evident that your conscience is not aligned with the way of life you have entered. You hold yourself apart. You hold yourself in a class apart. You say you would be lying to admit that you were critical and distrustful at Gower. If this is the case, then we are the liars, and obedience is turned on its head. You are in charge, you decide what is what. You divorce your soul from responsibility for actions. You say you are not critical, that you are trusting, but your actions betray you, and tell us an entirely different story. *Trust is simply a suspension of judgement, placing it into the hands of others*, in the hands of superiors, in the hands of God Himself, and accepting what is given to you whether you like it or not, whether it is merited or not, whether you agree with it or not, *in the spirit that our Holy Father Benedict demands of those who follow the Rule*. There is a marked lack of integrity in your life, between what you see and believe, versus what we see: *the obvious lack of acceptance in what is told to you*. This is not misunderstanding. This is denial. This is pride.

How I long for you to be able to say with your whole heart like the publican: "Oh Lord, be merciful to me a sinner!" It is such a beautiful thing before God and the angels when we can say: "I do have pride, I admit it, I mean it, I'm sorry for it, I will make my actions match my admissions and entrust myself to my superiors." And it's even more beautiful when others point out our pride to us, and we again fully admit it... *because it's true*, because we all have pride, that is our lot in this valley of tears. If one expends all her energy trying to get others to think that she doesn't, well, that soul is not to be trusted, because she's in denial of the truth. And someone who keeps denying it simply proves they have it. But again, *who doesn't??* How I long, Sister, how Jesus longs for you to simply say: "Jesus be merciful to me a sinner" and truly mean it, and then act accordingly. And if others see my pride, so much the better, because that is truth. And it is a further sign of denial if you are continually holding your judgment over others as you have. You have judged what works for others does not work for you, but this very lack of surrender is pride, which is Satan's stronghold. Can it be wondered at that you still claim to be struggling with demonic interference?

As monastics, and even more so as brides of Christ, we are all obliged to work on eradicating our pride - every single one of us, and that starts with surrendering to our superiors and their judgment. If you keep getting attacked, as you say, every time you do try to work on humility, that means you need to keep at it...you are even more obliged to get rid of it!

The patience of all of your superiors is wearing very thin, Sister, and this is the point where you need to make a decision. Will you finally surrender your will, and trust the community? Trust your superiors and their judgment, or will you continue to be your own mistress? You must decide, and we must be finished with the nonsense once and for all. If you don't have this power, then it is impossible to continue on, at least with us.

Know of my prayers, dear Sister, especially that you will be truly enlightened by the Holy Spirit.

In Corde Mariae,
Your Mother Abbess

From a sister I was close to in Ava, sent in Holy Week of 2026.

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PAX

Dear Rachel,

I am writing because we have just had an extraordinary visitation due to the Bishop receiving allegations from several women who were previously members of our community. We have not been told what the allegations were, but they are having an effect of great weight for our community. I don't know if you were one of those who wrote to the Bishop. I hope not. But in the event that you were, I write this at my own initiative. I know that you may not be open to reading anything come from me at this point. My only motive in asking permission to do this, and I leave it entirely in Mother Abbess' hands, is to offer you something of what I have learned through my own experience. If there's any possibility that it might help you to gain some increase in self-knowledge and to turn to Christ for His light and mercy, then I figure I must write.

First, I want to share something very personal. When I was at Regina Laudis, several months before I discerned to leave, when Covid restrictions were at their height with all the accompanying irreverence due to communion services and stress due to "safety" measures and pressure to get the vaccine, etc. we were reading St Teresa of Avila's book "Foundations". In it she describes a type of sister who, lacking self-knowledge and interior recollection, is a slave to her own opinions and melancholic emotions and so never gains mastery of her own will. She finds fault with others and especially with authority, refusing to take responsibility for her own lack of virtue. And so she is a burden to the community and the grace of the religious life rolls off her back like water off a duck. (This is my very loose rendition, not a direct quote!) This type of sister has to be treated as one who is sick and does not have command of her reason. The only hope for her perseverance is for her to recognize her need for unquestioning obedience and to submit herself to this definitively. When this was read in the refectory, I received a singular grace. I understood that I am that type of sister, and that only by total and unquestioning obedience would I be able to be healed of my sickness, a sickness both spiritual and emotional/psychological. In being granted that immense grace of self-knowledge it became increasingly clear that I could not practice that level of obedience at Regina Laudis, and with the help of God's grace and the grace of seeking the guidance of the Abbess there, I understood that I had to leave.

I had to work through moral, physical, and emotional trauma after leaving. I regret that initially I did give vent to bitterness and to some degree cast myself as a victim, analyzing and criticizing the disorders within the community. Thanks be to God, my parents and family did not encourage me in this though they had had concerns even when I entered. I was tempted to "right" the wrongs of religious life as I had experienced it, but by God's mercy, my knowledge of how deeply I had hurt him by my lack of obedience and trust, anchored me and made it clear that I needed to discern where He wanted me to be, rather than wasting time dwelling on the past and justifying myself.

When I decided to enter the Benedictines of Mary the actual practice of obedience was abhorrent to me. It contradicted my previous formation and made me painfully aware of how deeply ingrained are my prideful habits of interior murmuring, trying to control situations, asserting my opinions...the list

goes on. But again by God's grace, I recognize that only by total obedience, even foolish obedience, even obedience that at moments feels fake or hokey, can I be healed of my deep soul sickness.

Having lived with me, you know first-hand that I am not a model religious. However, I have begged the Lord for humility and obedience and, hearing my petitions, He has granted me the grace to convert, little by little. But this work of my conversion has been made possible only because I have superiors who are willing to ask obedience of me. Rather than questioning how much I can obey in good conscience, I realize that this is not the point. The *opportunity* to obey is the main point. It costs Mother Abbess Cecilia and Mother Mary Josefa much more to ask me to obey them as *personae Christi*, not relying on professionalism or credentials or structures of consent or any other protections. These are not necessarily bad things but they are worse than nothing if they replace the foundation of faith that must undergird and motivate free obedience. I know that there are many points of conversion needed for this community, but truly the lack of qualifications and even the acceptance of human failings, (not including sins that are incompatible with religious life), have helped me to ground my vows on a supernatural faith which sees God behind *everything*. I for my part cannot thank my superiors enough for being willing to ask this obedience of me. Oh if we but knew the gift we bear in earthen vessels! If we reject legitimate authority, we reject the most sure channel of grace. And if they fail to ask us obedience of us, they deprive of us of the grace that can only come through their office. There is nothing the devil wants so much as to close these channels, and how easily our pride can deceive us into thinking we are doing God's work when it's really his agenda we are furthering.

If you were involved in the allegations, I pray that you will see the full weight of undermining a religious community that has already suffered greatly in striving to be faithful to its calling. I wish you could appreciate just how much discretion and charity Mother Abbess Cecilia and Mother Mary Josefa have demonstrated through this time. It is a terrible responsibility to presume to judge them. I write this to you on my own initiative, hoping that perhaps you can learn something from my own mistakes and experience. I pray that you, or any who have written accusations, not be discouraged or despair because this could be your moment of grace, a life-changing opportunity to learn authentic humility. It is precisely the memory of my grievous acts of mistrust and ingratitude that ground me in true self-knowledge and reliance on God's merciful grace. Do not be afraid of your sins, but entrust yourself to God's mercy and ask, as the first converts in Acts did, "what then must we do?"

The blueberries, lilies, and the wild oregano from the woods are all pushing out their first shoots. I think of you and pray for you whenever I see them. Pray for me a sinner.

In Corde Jesu,

Your Sr. Pauline of the Theotokos

Sr. Pauline of the Theotokos

P.S. - Praying for you especially through these most holy days of the Triduum.

Letter Mother Abbess sent me in February 2026



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PAX

BENEDICTINES OF MARY, QUEEN OF APOSTLES

I am not sure if you received my e-mailed copy of this, but much to my extreme regret I just found today that I sent my first draft of the letter which was cut off, and not the final version which had a proper sign off etc. So please receive this with my apologies, best wishes and prayers.

Dear Rachel

Praised be Jesus Christ! I pray this finds you well, both spiritually and physically. I feel compelled to write you after two very disturbing things have reached me. The first occurred several weeks ago, when I learned that one of our aspirants who desires to join, was told that she should not by a priest. The second was a phone call from the Prioress of the Poor Clare community in Illinois, relaying with great concern what you had told her, and warning us that you were spreading calumnies against our community, and wanting to warn us. She understands like no other the damage a former member of any community can do, and we are very grateful that she informed us right away.

My dear Rachel, I need you to deeply understand that you are severely twisting reality, as you go about relating your negative experiences during 2023. You may have talked yourself into believing that the only thing you were undergoing was mold poisoning, I assure you, that is not the complete picture by any means. (If you do still not trust me, Sr. Scholastica, or Mother Mary Josefa, I encourage you to speak to any of the other Sisters who were witness to the events. In your mind, you blame us for "making you" open yourself to demonic influence, but this is simply not true. You yourself were under the influence without anyone forcing it on you so many times. Perhaps you recall the frequency with which I had to go to your cell to "awaken" you from the state into which you fell without any outside help? (To be clear, this is not a symptom of mold poisoning, as it was not for other Sisters.) Do you remember the numerous fits, and then attacks on Sisters, especially Sr. Scholastica, without any provocation? Yes, Father Stengel delved into calling up and confronting the demons directly as time went on, but we dismissed him *precisely* for that reason, among a great many other concerns. We had trusted him with this ministry – and you will blame us for what he encouraged? We brought in Fr. Martin [redacted], who urged the Sisters themselves to resist, without direct confrontation, but you then said you didn't agree with his method, and thought Fr. [redacted] was better. The stories you gave, and I'm afraid still give, have been twisted and changed so many times!

Rachel, for you to be spreading misinformation about what went on here, having convinced yourself that you were completely blameless, is frustrating, disheartening, and will lead to no good whatsoever, for our community, but especially for you. It seems you have your heart set on joining another religious order, but if you do not cease spreading distorted, fallacious information, there is no possible way that we will be able to give a positive recommendation to any superior. It is simply not possible!

I wonder if you would consider reading the Chapter *The Humility of Jesus* from Father Edward Leen's book, *In the Likeness of Christ*. I recommend it to *everyone*, as it is so helpful in understanding just how frequently we are prone to rebelling against God in all that He has decreed or allowed. He allowed you to be here, and undergo what you went through – along with the rest of us! – during that time. If you do not let go, seeing His hand in all things, but rather continue to resent, misrepresent, and calumniate us, your days moving forward will be very sad and difficult indeed. Please understand that each one of us will be held accountable for the words we spread abroad, as feathers from a pillow scattered in the wind. It is impossible for one to go back and pick them all up. Your deleterious words to others about our community have serious consequences, and I pray with all of my heart that you see and understand that, and determine within yourself to do no more harm.

Please know also of my prayers, and that all of this is said with great difficulty. But more than anything, I pray we are led closer to the Lord though the crosses He asks us to bear. A blessed Lent!

In His Merciful Heart,

Mother Cecilia osb

Mother Cecilia, osb, Abbess

Priory of Our Lady of Ephesus
[redacted]
[redacted]



BENEDICTINES OF MARY, QUEEN OF APOSTLES

†
PAX

2 June 2026

Dear and Reverend Fathers,

It has come to our attention that rumors have recently been circulating regarding events that occurred at the Abbey three years ago. These rumors themselves have impacted life here at the Abbey quite negatively, so I am moved to reach out to our beloved priests, in order that the truth may be conveyed if you have heard, or will hear of these rumors in the future. I would humbly ask that this letter or any information contained within it not be posted online, even anonymously.

What was originally thought to be a widespread case of mold poisoning in December of 2023 was, within 40 days, discovered to be a very severe demonic attack, which lasted for almost all of 2023. Sister Wilhelmina's incorrupt body was discovered in the very midst of it, and we are uncertain as to whether the unimaginable sufferings of that year were to try to prevent or retaliate against the great good that has come from the exhumation. The cause of the attacks could never be identified in the end, except through a possible entry point of former members, one in particular. Her grandfather was fully possessed and had cursed her, which she did not disclose before her entry. Looking back, we realized there were strange phenomenon the day she arrived and the day she departed, which coincided with the day the "mold poisoning" exploded in December of 2022. Our Bishop requested a visitation in December of 2023 because of the events of that year, and the visitators reported that we were free from the demonic attacks, and the community was in good health.

It is important to emphasize that no sister was ever found to be possessed, though a thorough exorcism protocol was followed for over eight months. The approach was very combative, and engaged directly with the demonic. In the end, we were made much worse by this approach. We were advised to discontinue with these exorcists, and engage a different one. In preparation for his task, the religious priest we secured studied a similar historic case in Loudun, France, in which expert exorcists failed by "overtreating" Sisters, which pushed them more towards possession-like behavior. So the priest employed the more successful method used in the account: rather than trying to seek information from demons or improve

on deliverance prayers through “reactions,” he urged the Sisters to *ignore* the demons and anything they might be pushing through obsession or oppression. He coached each Sister to simply resist the attacks and order her interior, moving her from fear to active trust in the Lord. In contrast to the eight hellish months, the attacks were repelled in about ten days.

We have learned from a variety of sources that a former novice has been circulating falsehoods, and attempted to build a coalition, we think perhaps to justify her departure. She has actively disseminated decontextualized anecdotes, wild tales and false information about the attacks, purporting them as ongoing, while omitting that she was one of the worst cases in the monastery. The community has now undergone another visitation, a very difficult one, just this past March, brought on by the accusations of this novice and a couple of other former members, who had their own interior difficulties. In this last visitation, we were completely acquitted of the false charges made against us.

We ask in your charity to pray for us, and to assist us by disseminating this information to your brother priests when appropriate. I do ask that it not be dispersed to the laity, but simply serve as a definitive statement to clergy who need answers to rumors that they have heard, so that they may know what really happened, and will be able to assist the laity if asked about it. Please do feel free to call or email me with any further questions you may have. And Bishop James Johnston, our Ordinary, is also happy to answer any questions about this matter as well.

Thank you so much for your prayers, and know that you remain in ours. We especially ask Our Lord that the whole Church militant will take up the strong weapons of virtue, rather than succumb to a culture of spiritual fear; preoccupied, or even fascinated with the diabolical element of the spiritual life.

May God bless and reward you, and our loving Mother keep you all~

In Her Heart,

Mother Cecilia Snell, OSB

Mother Cecilia Snell, OSB