

## Background of Sophia Program

In the fall of 2006, the Spirituality Center began the *Sophia Program for Women in Lay Ecclesial Ministry*.

Here is some background that will help you understand why the sisters, in partnership with others, have initiated the Sophia Program.

In the monastery's 150-year history, the monastic community has always collaborated with laypersons in any work that we have done. The sisters recognize the key role of lay ecclesial ministers in meeting the spiritual needs of persons in parishes and wish to affirm their work. As part of our own strategic plan, the Sisters of Saint Benedict have as one focus, enriching the spiritual lives of women both within the monastery and in the surrounding community.

The mission of the Sophia Program is to support women in church ministry in their daily spiritual journey. A particular aspect of the program is to provide group spiritual companionship in which each woman intentionally identifies how her own spiritual life impacts her ministry and how her ministry shapes her spiritual life. Other goals of the program include creating a space and place where each woman may go beyond external and internal noise and listen deeply to God and to herself for her own good and for the good of her ministry in the Church.

Central to the mission of the Sophia Program is the formation of Wisdom Circles. Wisdom Circles are groups of five to eight women from various church-related ministries. The women who form Wisdom Circles *commit themselves to gathering three times a year for two years from Sunday evening through Tuesday early evening*. The goal of the experience of the Wisdom Circles is to enter deeply into wisdom by means of alternating patterns of prayer, leisure, silence and community. Experience teaches that patterns and rhythms are restorative of body and soul. The life-giving spiritual network of the Sophia Program will provide support and encouragement to lay women as they attempt to meet the many demands asked of them in both ministry and family/personal life.

Applicants for the program have expanded from a variety of ministries in the St. Cloud Diocese to the inclusion of all catholic dioceses and is now open to all denominations of Christian ministers.

The projected cost for each person for the two-year program is approximately \$2,100. The Sisters of Saint Benedict have established an endowment to subsidize expenses and to promote the program. Currently, the fee for participants is \$150 per session.