

# Benedictine Sisters of Virginia building 'Place of Peace'

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Big changes are taking place on the grounds at the Benedictine Sisters of Virginia monastery in Bristow where the sisters are transforming their 120-acre site into a "Place of Peace."

Construction is in full swing at the site that will be highlighted by a labyrinth garden at a cost of \$132,500.

The garden will aid those who are on the path toward a more balanced spiritual life, the sisters say. The area also includes the renovation of two long-abandoned grain silos that will stand as monuments to peace and allow visitors to feel deep, personal quiet within themselves.

Leaving this area, visitors will be guided through the pine grove meditation garden to the fountain of peace garden. These features form an outdoor sanctuary or cathedral.

Stations of the Cross will be placed along a meandering path through an aged cedar grove. A meditation garden and a resurrection garden will be built adjacent to the grove to enhance the experience of the stations.

"Other improvements will include a walkway along a creek leading to an ancient grotto and together with the wildflower gardens will provide natural beauty to uplift the spirit," said Sister Louise Dowgiallo, who is heading up the project which will have three loops, a Peace, Tranquility and Monastic.

Forty "Peace Poles" honoring the universality of humanity expressed in multiple languages will be strategically placed throughout the grounds to inform and direct the visitors. Parking lots, rest rooms and handicapped accessibility are planned.

The total project is estimated to cost \$566,800.



Bennie Scarton Jr./News & Messenger

**Sister Louise Dowgiallo and Ron Cloer, Place of Peace project manager, check progress on the building of the labyrinth garden at the Benedictine Sisters of Virginia monastery at Bristow. The renovation of the Sint Benedict Shrine, at right, will add additional landscaping.**

"Our goal is to offer this prayerful, beautiful outdoor sanctuary to anyone seeking a meaningful spiritual experience as a gesture of welcoming them to the Benedictine tradition of hospitality," said Sister Dowgiallo.

A ribbon-cutting is set for 11:30 a.m. May 1.

It will be part of the sisters' 112th anniversary of the establishment of the Motherhouse in Bristow. The monastery is at 9535 Linton Hall Road.

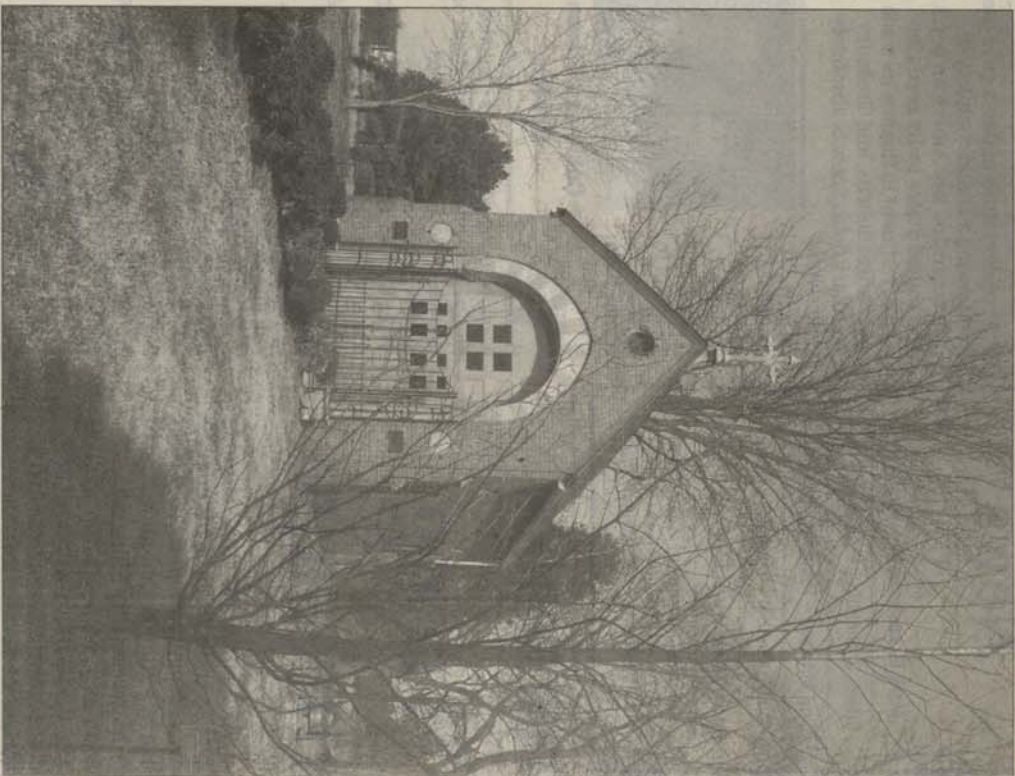
The sisters came to the state in 1868, settling first in Richmond before establishing the foundation of the present day community in the spring of 1894.

"This is an exciting day for us — in

each sister's life — as well in the Bristow Benedictine community and the history of Prince William County," said Sister Dowgiallo.

Of the project, Sister Cecilia Dwyer, prioress, said, "Our principal goal is to provide a place where all who seek quiet, prayer, meditation, beauty and peace may come and find that for which they yearn."

"As a community, we have always respected the sacredness of our green space. Now, as our surrounding community is rapidly developing, our desire to preserve the natural beauty of our grounds has deepened and we feel further called to share this space actively with our neighbors. We welcome



those of all faith traditions and we continue to extend hospitality to all peoples."

Thirty-five volunteers have worked to develop the plans at the monastery which houses 35 sisters. One-hundred-fifty plants will be planted at the site. An estimated 140 benches will be

placed throughout the gardens. The renovation in 2002 of the Saint Benedict Shrine, built in 1930, started the sisters on the current "monumental" project on their grounds.

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