

Reflections on *Blue Hole Wisdom: My Journey with the Sisters*
A Reader's Guide

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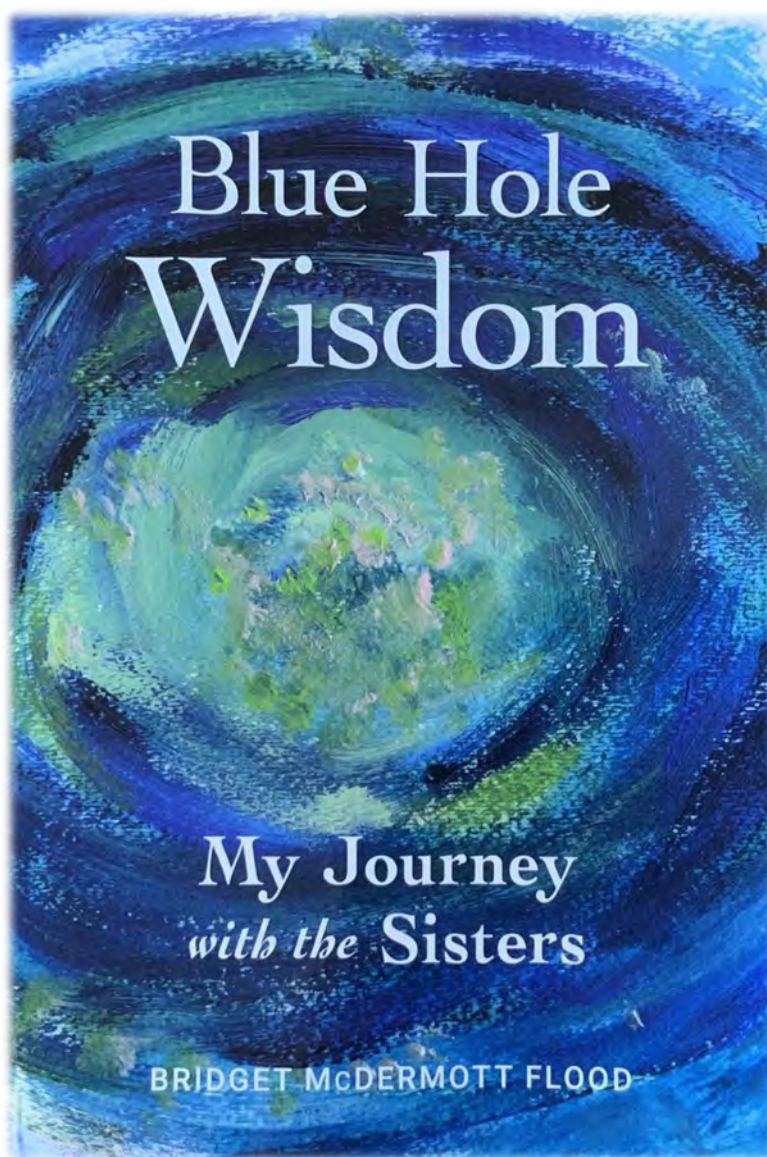


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Introduction to the Reader's Guide

Blue Hole Wisdom: my Journey with the Sisters is the story of author Bridget McDermott Flood's warm relationship with the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio, Texas, over the past twenty years. The book chronicles the presence of the Congregation in the United States, Mexico, Peru, Chile, and Colombia from the time of its founding in 1869 to the present. The story weaves together Sisters' personal remembrances and reflections, capturing their Charism of Incarnational Spirituality, their desire "to make the love of God real and tangible in the world today."

This Guide is intended to guide the reader through each chapter and offer suggestions for using its contents for personal growth, instruction, or group sharing. Each page is designed to be used as a separate exercise where the group or individual reads the chapter, (either before or during the meeting), and discusses the questions or engages in personal reflection. The chapters and pages do not need to be read in order. The author also encourages readers to add their own questions, based on inspiration gleaned from their reading. The photographs are from her travels with the Sisters, except as noted.



The Blue Hole, San Antonio

Changing Habits: Blue Hole Wisdom

“[The Sisters’] wisdom runs deep, clear, and pure. It is a wisdom derived from their Incarnational Spirituality, their belief that God is present in all things, and that God is most present in relationship,” p. 2.

1. What is my perception of Catholic Sisters today?
2. Do I know any Catholic Sisters? If my answer is “No,” what would I like to learn about them?
3. Can I articulate some differences in the Catholic Church since Vatican II?
4. How do the changes in the Catholic Church change what I know about that faith?
5. From reading this Chapter, what do I understand by “Incarnational Spirituality”? What are some of the key characteristics?

To learn more about the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, visit www.amormeus.org.

To learn about their peace and justice work, visit <https://www.amormeus.org/en/justice-peace-and-integrity-of-creation/>



*Scapular of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word
Image Source: The Congregation*

A Journey Over the Waters

“We would do whatever we could with the funding available. We were on the frontier of a new ministry,” p. 11.

1. Can I picture myself in my early 20’s, traveling to another country, not understanding the language, yet willing and able to begin caring for the sick and taking care of children?
2. How would I feel under these circumstances?
3. What qualities does it take to overcome obstacles when faced with a difficult challenge?
4. What challenges have I had where I have faced the unknown and how did I meet those challenges?
5. The chapter talks about the value of a small foundation. Am I able to articulate the advantages of creating or working in a smaller environment? Is bigger always better?



*Mother St. Pierre Cinquin, CCVI
& Mother Madeleine Chollet, CCVI
Photo Source: Congregational Archives*

Taking the Train: Answering the Call

“Choosing to become a woman religious was and remains a countercultural decision,” p. 14.

1. When do I ask myself, “What is God calling me to do?”
2. How do I respond to God’s call?
3. What qualities are needed when responding to God’s call?
4. How does reading this chapter help me deepen my understanding of “Incarnational Spirituality”?
5. How does reading this chapter change my ideas about who Catholic Sisters are?



Incarnate Word Motherhouse Facade, San Antonio

Grace Comes When it Needs to Happen

“How do we use our gift of life not only as individual Sisters, but also as a community of Sisters in the world?” p. 27.

1. What are some examples of shared leadership in my personal experience? Am I able to practice shared leadership in my work?
2. Can I honestly say I know myself? What motivates me? What holds me back from proceeding when I know I’m right?
3. What is my current worldview? Do I take enough time to reflect on the world situation?
4. How do I interpret current affairs through the eyes of faith?
5. How are my insights into “Incarnational Spirituality” becoming stronger?



The Blue Hole, San Antonio

Chispas Divina: We are Sparks of the Divine

“The most important truth to take from [a difficult] experience is that you have to be responsible for your own life,” p. 34.

1. Have I ever made a mistake, which caused embarrassment, misunderstanding, or even scandal?
2. How did I respond to my mistake?
3. What was I able to do to reclaim my integrity?
4. How do I experience the “Divine Presence” in my life? Do I allow myself to take time to enjoy that presence?
5. Do I really believe that God is present in every person? What is my response to recognizing that presence?



The Blue Hole, San Antonio

God Within: The Incarnation

“Charism is a gift from God that helps you live out your faith or the Gospel.... Charism is the Sisters’ underlying philosophy,” p. 38

1. What is my charism? How did I come to recognize this gift in my life?
2. How does my charism influence the ways in which I interact with others at work and at home?
3. Do I really listen to every person with whom I am in conversation?
4. Am I able to see God’s presence in every living thing?



Angel's Trumpet

Joy to the World

“My job is to bring joy to the world,” p. 50

1. What is my “job”?
2. How can I bring joy to the world in my daily life and work?
3. How can I create an environment in my home that reflects my values and commitment to bring joy to the world?
4. How can I create an environment in my workplace that reflects my values and commitment to bring joy to the world?



Texas Mountain Laurel

The Journey to Emmaus: Living the Spirit

“[It] will never be everything it could have been because the mission is not front and center,” p. 60

1. When I encounter serious conflict, how do I handle it?
2. Can I recognize when my ego is taking over, causing me to lose perspective?
3. Am I free and able to confront calmly the ego-centered conduct of others?
4. What strategies help keep the focus on the mission instead of on egos?
5. How do I stay centered on the mission?



Chapel of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio

Packing the Trunk: Answering the Call

“And that was one of the first wonderful lessons of life—let go and let God,” p. 63

1. When have I let something go and opened myself to new possibilities?
2. When have I been asked to do something I did not wish to do, but would contribute to the common good?
3. What was my response? How did I feel?
4. Did that response lead to greater happiness or to regret?



Rebarn Weathervane, San Antonio

The String and the Kite: What is God Telling You?

“Sometimes the string keeps a kite from flying too high. Other times the string is truly a lifeline,”
p. 69

1. Do I perceive myself as a string? Or as a kite?
2. How do I use this metaphorical identity for self-realization and for the common good?
3. What is my attitude toward persons seeking asylum in the United States?
4. Can I see the rationale for those who think differently about undocumented persons?



El Paso Mural

Bougainvillea: Finding the Garden

“Relationships are not instantaneous, especially when you need to take time to learn another person’s culture,” p. 74

1. When have I taken “a journey” that involved meeting or working with people, whose life experiences are different from my own, and how did that change my understanding of the world?
2. How do I encounter the poor in my everyday life? What are my attitudes toward the economically poor? Where are areas where I need more understanding or more knowledge?
3. In what ways can I address the widening gap between the rich and the poor in our country?
4. Are there ways I can bring my gifts to work with those who are poor in my work or personal life?



Jardin Del Tepeyac, Mexico City

Chiapas: How are You in Your Heart?

“Our Sisters worked hand in glove with the people...serving the myriad needs of the people and being a presence integrated into the community,” p. 82

1. How does creating and working in a coffee plantation relate to the mission of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word?
2. What does reading about this particular ministry of the Sisters teach me about Incarnational Spirituality? Can I articulate what I am learning?
3. When I ask people, “How are you,” do I listen carefully to their response?
4. What concrete steps can I take to have more authentic relationships?
5. How do I build genuine relationships with my work colleagues?



Nich Klum Coffee Mug

Table Sharing: Creating Communities of Love

“If you envision something, it will happen,” p. 86

1. How do I define my community?
2. Does being part of this community give me more life?
3. If my community is not giving me life, how can I discover/build a life-giving community?
4. Do I see the richness of relating to persons from diverse cultures? Why is that important?
5. When have I participated in “table sharing”?
6. How can I set a table for sharing?



Strawberries

Going to Gruene: Finding Fulfillment in Relationships

“Deepening relationships is challenging and demands staying in touch with both your inner self and [that of the other],” p. 94

1. Why is it important to take “alone time”?
2. When I experience “alone time,” what is my response?
3. How do I fill up my “alone time”?
4. Can I use the gift of “alone time” to reach out to those I love as well as those who need my presence?



The Blue Hole, San Antonio

Amazing Grace: The Journey Begins with a Blessing

“She gave me the gift of her joy in serving others, a joy that skipped over hardship and fear, and landed right with the people who gave love and joy in turn,” p. 99.

1. Am I in touch with the impact of poverty in other parts of the world as well as in my own community?
2. If I am not in touch with this reality, what can I do to educate and sensitize myself?
3. Do I realize what it means to be patronizing to those with less than me—fewer material advantages, less education, less social grace?
4. What was a time when someone gave me the confidence to step out of my comfort zone and engage with others?
5. How can I help others step out of their comfort zone?



Aldermarsh Prayer Flags, Whidbey Island, WA

Dancing the Circle: The Women of Mongu

“While the communities could not be more different in some aspects, they shared a love for their neighbors, years of trust and mutual support, and the shrewd wisdom and practical common sense that have been the bedrock of women’s relationships,” pp. 105-6.

1. When preparing a presentation, do I sufficiently research my audience to discern their specific needs or expected outcomes?
2. What are the signs that an audience isn’t seeing that my words are responding to their expectations?
3. How have I changed my approach quickly in response to audience reaction?
4. Do I ever underestimate the wisdom and resourcefulness of persons I am addressing, teaching, or speaking with?
5. What are creative ways to engage with an audience?



Zambian Crafts

Nalikwanda: Finding a Friend

“She asked us one by one if we wanted to stay or go. Each of us wanted to stay,” p. 112

1. Have I ever been in a situation of danger when I feared I might lose my life? How did I feel?
2. If I were invited to leave a situation of danger when others might be helped by my presence, would I have done so? Why or why not?
3. Can I differentiate between “protecting” others and “walking with” others?
4. Do I cling to a need to “protect” and therefore identify with a power structure?



Labyrinth, Whidbey Island, WA

Rebarn: The Mission Lives Within

“You see, the mission is always with me,” p. 118

1. What is my “mission” in life?
2. What gifts do I bring to my mission in life?
3. Am I free to pursue that mission in every place and in every circumstance?
4. Is there a place or circumstance that holds me back from exploring new possibilities?
5. What can I/do I want to do to change this?



Votives, Mexico City

Give it to God: Believe

“[E]very day almost everyone in the world is trying to do good, and . . . by and large, we are all doing the best that we can,” p. 122.

1. Do I allow worry to overtake and paralyze me? Can I identify some examples?
2. What happens inside me when I allow this to happen?
3. What gives me enough faith to believe that God is present in the situation that is causing me to worry?
4. Do I have enough faith to believe that God will show me how to handle the situation and dispel the concern?
5. When did I overcome worry and move in a positive direction?



Cheekwood, Nashville

Deep Peace: The Vatican Visitation

“None of us doubted that the Sisters and their ministries were on the right path,” p. 139.

1. Have I ever knowingly been under suspicion of doing something wrong?
2. How did realizing I was suspect make me feel?
3. Was I able to transform the anger and fear into confident belief that the suspicion was misguided?
4. What growth came from this experience? How did it change how I relate to others?



The Lourdes Grotto, San Antonio

Tea and Tamales: A Time to Forgive

“What do we gain when we set the old paradigms and prejudices aside and open ourselves to the beautiful reality of the diversity of human experience, when we open ourselves to the Incarnation?”
p. 155.

1. Do I recognize my personal prejudices and erroneous judgments about people I do not know or understand?
2. Can I name some examples of these prejudices?
3. When have I confronted a prejudice or bias?
4. Have I experienced prejudice or bias myself?
5. How did I/do I learn to grow beyond them into acceptance and appreciation of differences?
6. What happens when I realize that I cannot change others; I can only change myself?



Brackenridge Villa Stained Glass Window, San Antonio

Open the Tent Wide: Welcoming the Laity

“I realized this [isn’t] just about doing something; it’s about doing something together,” p. 160

1. Am I able to see that the best way to accomplish a significant task is often to network?
2. Am I open to realizing that networking with others invites skills and insights that I may be unable to identify when I work alone?
3. When I’ve been on the outside, what happened when others have invited me into a group?
4. How large is my tent?
5. How can I open my tent wider?



Brackenridge Villa Fountain, San Antonio

Jeremiah Calls Me: Living a Mantra

**“From before you were born, I knew you. From before you were born, I dedicated you,”
- Jeremiah 1:5**

1. Do I have enough faith to comprehend that God created me because God loves me?
2. What is that singular love of God asking of me?
3. Can I see my own limitations as a call to a deeper appreciation of community life?
4. When have I felt that God called me? How did I respond to that call?
5. When have I seen God call others? How have I supported them when they were called and dedicated?



Bleeding Hearts

Deep Waters: The Interior Life

“We need to build in . . . what I could call the reflective capacity, or the reflective possibility, to examine what is going on in my life,” p. 177

1. Do I see my life as abundance? Am I able to appreciate the gift of life itself?
2. Does this realization of abundance compel me to help and encourage others to recognize their own giftedness?
3. Do I give myself time and opportunity to reflect on the meaning of my life?
4. Do I make opportunities to reflect with others on the abundance we share?



The Blue Hole, San Antonio

Trust in God: Solidarity in Peru

“It was a time of being constantly aware of God’s presence. Everything that was happening made us be more trusting in God,” p. 184

1. Have I ever been truly afraid that I was in grave danger?
2. When have I worked with persons I believed I could not trust?
3. How did I respond to these fears?
4. Did overcoming these fears result in deeper peace?
5. What can I do to build trust in the workplace environment?
6. How do we create a culture of trust and respect?



Altar Mosaic, The Heritage Center, San Antonio

Nuevo Chimbote: Beyond Where the Road Ends

“People are so much more than they seem,” p. 192

1. Do I know persons who have done heroic things? Do I ever tell them how much I appreciate them?
2. Do I take time to be and speak with people so that I can come to know and appreciate them more?
3. Am I a person who brings hope to others?
4. Having read thus far, do I have a better understanding of “Incarnational Spirituality”?
5. Do I have the courage to go beyond “where the road ends”?



Outskirts of Chimbote, Peru

Our Future: A Frontier Charism

“Generally, the Sisters do not express much anxiety or worry about what comes next. They are confident that the future will unfold as it should,” p. 197

1. Do I spend time worrying about what might happen in the future?
2. Am I in touch with the changes occurring in all of society?
3. Do I recognize a call to radicality?
4. When I encounter obstacles to accomplish a goal, can I find the creativity to take another approach?
5. Am I a person who can see “endless possibilities”?



Machu Picchu, Peru

Jubilee: Here I Am, Lord

**“Your . . . years of steadfastness is undoubtedly the quiet voice of God speaking to our time,”
p. 210**

1. Can I look back on my life and realize how each decision, each response has led to new opportunities?
2. Is my heart filled with gratitude for all that has happened in my life—even in the most difficult times?
3. Am I joyful, knowing that any good thing I might have started or participated in will go on, whether I am there or not?
4. How do I see myself as a part of the mission that was entrusted to the Sisters? How am I passing on that mission to others?



Sanctuary, Chapel of the Incarnate Word, San Antonio

250 Bowls: Holding the Spirit

“Lining [up the bowls] on the table at first glance, they were a uniform Congregation. Upon more intense scrutiny, individuality asserted itself,” p. 220

1. What are the symbols that I encounter as part of my work that embody the spirit of the organization?
2. What do I envision as a symbol that might reflect the depth of who I am?
3. How do I integrate that symbol into my reality to keep reminded of the richness of my life?



250 Blue Bowls