

## Collegeville Institute Receives \$1.5 Million Grant

The Collegeville Institute received a four-year, \$1.5 million grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. to continue and expand the comprehensive program *Words Making Worlds: The Ecclesial Literature Project*.

*The Ecclesial Literature Project*, which began in 2006, is designed to stimulate and nourish vital cultures of religious and theological literacy within mainstream congregations around the country. It will provide at the Collegeville Institute and at select regional locations around the United States a unique ecumenical community for writers who want to incorporate religious matters in their writing, support pastors and others who intend



An afternoon session of reviewing manuscripts, Summer 2015.

to reach a broad reading audience through writing, and further the place of the written word in the Christian life.

The following three quotes from summer 2015 workshop participants highlight the impact of the program's work.

*"This has been a transformative program for me. I loved having time to unite with colleagues; I loved being around fellow writers. Honestly, this week has been inspiring, spiritual, and exciting. I am very grateful for this week, as it has helped me regain a sense of enthusiasm about my work and ministry, and a clarity of purpose."*

*"I am grateful for this opportunity and know that it will continue to nourish my own*

*writing—and my skills for sharing that writing in the world—for a long time to come. This was an incredible resource for learning. The diversity of faith backgrounds of participants was a real advantage. The community of writers here was amazing. I have come away with such inspiration and friendship for the journey forward."*

*"This workshop helped me grow and stretch in my use of words, phrasing, and sound; grow in the art and craft of preaching and writing. How I say something helps the hearer, or the reader, better understand what I am trying to convey, and may affect them in ways that only the Spirit can. This can only strengthen the people I serve. This can only strengthen the whole church."*



Writing workshop leader, Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, reads to the *Writing to Change the World* workshop participants.

## Meet Br. Aaron Raverty



**Br. Aaron Raverty, OSB** began serving as the Saint John's Abbey/Collegeville Institute liaison at the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year. In an effort to learn

more about him, our staff conducted the following interview.

### What led you to Saint John's Abbey and the monastic life?

Even as a child, I had a strong desire to enter religious life. As a Catholic grade-schooler in St. Paul, MN, I recall being moved by the teaching skills, unwavering devotion, and spiritual sensitivity of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, who formed me in many ways. And almost every day, after school, I felt drawn to enter the adjacent parish church and have a little talk with God.

Years later, as a graduate student at Penn State, the Benedictines from Saint Vincent Archabbey (the motherhouse of Saint John's), hosted me at their monastery and encouraged me to visit Saint John's upon my return to Minnesota. They introduced me to a Benedictine ethos, and when I first set foot at Saint John's, I felt immediately at home. And so I have maintained my monastic vow of *stabilitas*—stability both of place and heart—ever since, for the past forty-plus years.

**You are trained as a sociocultural anthropologist. Could you describe what**

**that means and what drew you to that field?**

I think my mother first sparked my interest here. She and my uncle visited many of the Anasazi cliff dwellings during her summer vacations in the Southwest U.S., and I recall the excitement I felt when she described some of the things she saw and experienced. She conjured up in my already active imagination descriptions of the reconstructed lifeways of these “ancient ones.” Anthropologist Conrad Phillip Kottak summarizes my longing when he describes anthropology as “the exploration of human diversity.” I remember trying to make sense of it all. What did it really mean to be a human being in both the broadest and most basic sense of that term?

### How did you become involved in the work of interreligious dialogue?

As a teenager, I used to go to the library in St. Paul to read the scriptures and other sacred writings from non-Christian religions. I never felt that these writings thwarted my Catholic upbringing; on the contrary, the various perspectives complemented my own understanding of the Catholic faith. God must love diversity; otherwise, why would God have allowed religious multiplicity to come into being in the first place?

In 2014, I published a book, *Refuge in Crestone: A Sanctuary for Interreligious Dialogue* (Lexington Books) that epitomizes my fascination with the interplay between anthropological research methods and the Catholic quest to develop a theology of religions.

**What did you learn from your monastic**

**exchanges with Buddhist monks in Nepal and Tibet?**

In the 1990s, as secretary of the board of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue, I joined an exchange program whereby Tibetan Buddhist monastics and North American Catholic monastics reciprocated travel to immerse themselves in each other's geographic setting and monastic lifestyle. I was a guest of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and his staff in Dharamsala, India. I traveled to some of the classic sites of Tibetan Buddhist monasticism in Nepal, Tibet, and northern India, where, through translators, I expounded our Catholic faith in many different settings of monastic men and women, learning a great deal about Tibetan Buddhist monasticism in turn.

### Tell us more about your hobbies, and why they're important to you.

I've always enjoyed trekking. These walks were refreshing, helped me deal with feelings and work out issues, and fed my interest in diversity since I loved to observe all kinds of things around me. I suspect my captivation with birds and birdwatching grew out of this interest in trekking.

Another hobby is handwriting analysis. I obtained certification in the system of Graphoanalysis®. I studied Graphoanalysis because of my fascination with human diversity—in this case, by the many different constellations of personality traits in human beings that can be discovered through handwriting analysis.

Music captivates me, too. I sing in the Saint John's Abbey Schola, and also sing as a precentor at abbey liturgies.

## The Book Nook

Former short-term resident scholar, **Heidi Neumark's** most recent book, *Hidden Inheritance: Family Secrets, Memory and Faith* (Abingdon Press, 2015) plunges readers into the depths of her personal story of the discovery—and recovery—of her hidden Jewish heritage.

Heidi's life and identity changed forever when she learned relatively late in life that her family's painful history related to their Jewish faith had been kept secret for generations. Several

members of her family were victims of the Holocaust: her grandfather was murdered, her grandmother was a death-camp survivor, and her father left Germany and emigrated to the U.S.

Last November, Heidi shared her family's story of horror, courage, resilience, and abiding faith with a group of Collegeville Institute board members, friends, and guests.

**Richard Lischer**, former summer writing workshop leader

wrote about Heidi's book, “*There is much to be learned from her story, much to be repented, and much to be felt. A book not only to be read but absorbed.*”

Former summer workshop leader **Lillian Daniel** wrote, “*This is a family tree worth climbing.*”

In her acknowledgements, Heidi extended thanks to the Collegeville Institute for providing time apart for reflection and writing, and for project and logistical support.

