



## *In Memoriam*

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### *Herbert Eugene Herr May 11, 1932—January 1, 2012*

Gene Herr, mentor and friend to so many and co-founder of The Hermitage died on January 1, 2012 after a struggle with brain cancer. From a vision for a place where “pastors and other pilgrims can come away and rest,” Gene and his wife Mary established The Hermitage in 1985. They directed the program and developed the facility until 2001. During their time here, Gene worked side-by-side with other visionaries who renovated St. Joseph’s Barn, eventually finishing with nine

guest rooms, kitchen, dining room and common meeting areas. He worked to complete the Ken Hanby Center with its chapel, library, meeting space additional guest rooms, and office. Gene’s spirit pervades the trails and each of the three hermitage cabins tucked into the wooded area. Gene sat with many pastors and other people in Spiritual Direction, listening for the movement of the Holy Spirit. He wrote The Hermitage Affirmation liturgy that forms the basis of the Hermitage Community ethos. Gene’s infectious laughter, welcoming spirit, and love of ice cream resides in our memories.

### *Gene Herr Memorial Spring Work Day—April 21, 2012*

Gene Herr used some of his considerable energy planting and tending trees at the Hermitage. He also left instructions when he retired to continue to feed the birds and pray for the saints.

To honor Gene’s life and extend his legacy, the Board of Directors is hosting a Spring Work Day and Memorial Tree Planting on Saturday, April 21. We will plant trees, create a permanent bird feeding station and do other spring cleaning tasks. Plan to join

us at 8:00 for Morning Prayer or 9:00 for the work session. We will break for lunch at 12:30. At 3:00 we will have a memorial tree planting ceremony and will close with vespers at 4:30. Join us for all or part of the day. Overnight stays can be accommodated. Call to register: 269-244-8696.

*We are also collecting your written memories of Gene at The Hermitage for a future Newsletter. Please send your submission by June 1 to: thehermitage@juno.com or to the mailing address.*

Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to your cross I cling;  
Naked, come to you for dress;  
Helpless, look to you for grace;  
Foul, I to the fountain fly;  
Wash me, Savior, or I die.

*-Augustus Toplady*

## *Lent Reflection—Beneath the Cross*

In a time when we are more likely to see the cross rendered as a beautiful piece of jewelry than as an instrument of torture, I wonder what we can learn from the cross. Why has it become such an object of devotion?

The old gospel hymns dwell broadly on the theology of the cross. Some, like Augustus Toplady's "Rock of Ages," (see verse 3 on page 1) remind the believer of the efficacy of Jesus' death. "I Am Thine, O Lord," by Fanny Crosby draws us "nearer ... to the cross" which serves to focus attention away from distractions and toward the "depths of delight of a single hour ... in prayer ... [when I] commune [with God] as friend with friend." The other verses of that hymn dwell on deepening faith, increased service and joy in God's eternal presence. As I thumb through my old camp meeting song book, I see the cross held up, not as a holy relic, but as a reminder of inner commitment and devotion. I believe these hymn writ-

ers understood that the meaning of the cross is found not in some mystical shape. The meaning is deeper. It is in Jesus' willingness to do God's will. That crucial decision was made, not on the cross, but in the garden. On a night of disappointment as a friend leaves the "family" dinner to betray him, of struggle as a disciple refuses his loving act of foot-washing, and of weary abandonment as his close friends all fall asleep while on watch, Jesus wrestles with his own will, finally subduing it with the words, "your will be done."

We adore the cross because it represents Jesus' deep surrender to and union with God's will. And we often find this kind of surrender so elusive in our daily lives. If, like Jesus, we would say, "yes" to God, even in the face of a difficult trial, we need to cling to his example for courage. Let the cross be a reminder, this season, that "with God, all things are possible."

-Naomi R. Wenger

*Father,  
I abandon myself into  
your hands; do with me  
what you will.  
Whatever you may do, I  
thank you.  
I am ready for all, I accept  
all.  
Let only your will be done  
in me, and in all your  
creatures.  
I wish no more than this,  
O Lord.  
Into your hands I com-  
mend my soul;  
I offer it to you with all the  
love of my heart,  
for I love you, Lord,  
and so need to give my-  
self into your hands,  
without reserve,  
and with boundless confi-  
dence  
for you are my father.*

*-Charles de Foucauld*

## *Hermitage JAM-Feast of the Transfiguration*

Plan to join us for the annual Hermitage Jam and Feast of the Transfiguration retreat. The Jam workday will be held on Friday, August, 3. Workers will pick blackberries, make jam and tend to other outdoor chores.

On Saturday, August 4, we will gather for a retreat based on the Transfiguration story. Mary Schertz of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana will guide our retreat. Mary is a New Testament scholar who

brings a deep personal devotion to her interpretation of the text.

There is no cost for either of these events. If you wish to stay overnight between the events, register early. Donations are accepted for the overnight stay. Contact us to register: [www.hermitagecommunity.org](http://www.hermitagecommunity.org), [thehermitage@juno.com](mailto:thehermitage@juno.com), or 269-244-8696.

## Men's Spirituality Retreat—Being God's Warrior

All men are called to be warriors at some point in their lives. In a world of dark warriors who think and act in terms of muscle, aggression and domination, there is a great need for mature warriors—men with forceful energy who are sacrificial, courageous, and strong; men who are devoted to a greater good, fight for what is right, and protect others. Join Steve Thomas, a Mennonite pastor and martial artist who will lead men in discussions and exercises to engage the warrior within.

The Warrior retreat will be held May 4-5, 2012 at The Hermitage begin-

ning at 7pm on Friday and ending at 4pm on Saturday. Participants are welcome to stay on for personal retreat through Sunday, May 6.

The cost is \$70. The suggested donation for an additional night is \$50.

To register, e-mail or call David Wenger (thehermitage@juno.com or (269) 244-8696). A deposit of \$30 by April 21 will secure your place. Send a check to The Hermitage (address on back page).

*This retreat is sponsored by the Indiana-Michigan M.A.L.E.s (Men as Learners and Elders).*

### **Donna Rae Rathert**

**February 25, 1949—December 28, 2011**

Donna began her friendship with The Hermitage five years ago. She led icon writing and other retreats. She was commissioned to write the icon, "The Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ," which hangs in the Chapel of the Transfiguration, for the 25th Anniversary of The Hermitage. It was the final icon of her career. Donna devoted her life to deepening her relationships with God, her family, her friends and her community. Her quiet presence, ready smile, insightful vision and gentle spirit will be missed. Donna's memorial service was held at St. John's Lutheran Church in Three Rivers, Michigan at 10 am on March 17, 2012.

## Board Transitions

Allan Martling (Lansing, MI) served two consecutive terms for a total of six years on the board. He served as chair of the board for the past three years. Allen led the way through the St. Joseph's Barn Sabbatical campaign to raise funds for much needed facility improvements over the past several years. Allan continues to pray for the Hermitage each day, as he has done for all of his years of service.

Cheryl Nakata (Chicago, IL) served a three year term ending in December 2011. While she wished to served another term, added job responsibilities and health concerns keeps her from serving at this time. Cheryl has blessed the board with her prayerful presence and careful listening.

Darrin Compagner (Rockford, MI) served a three year term, ending his

*(Continued on page 4)*

## hermitage calendar

### April

1-7 Stations of the Cross Walk (self-guided)

8 Taizé Evensong  
7:00 pm

21 Gene Herr Memorial Work Day

### May

4-5 Warrior Retreat

13 Taizé Evensong  
7:00 pm

### June

10 Taizé Evensong  
7:00 pm

### July

8 Taizé Evensong  
7:00 pm

### August

3 Hermitage Jam

4 Feast of the Transfiguration

*Note: No Taizé Evensong in August*

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service to take a new pastoral position that needs his full attention. Darrin's love for The Hermitage spans many years and it is shared by his wife, Sarah and children, Elijah, Rebekah and Hannah who assisted with daily operations during the directors' sabbaticals in 2009.

Thank you Allen, Cheryl and Darrin for your work in holding this space for attentiveness

to God through your board service.

We are pleased to welcome Jeff Miller to the board in 2012. Jeff has been retreating regularly at the Hermitage for nearly ten years and was eager to increase his connection here. Thank you Jeff.

And thank you to Kevin Driedger who has taken up the mantle of board chair. Your leadership among us is gratefully received.

## *Retreating at The Hermitage*



Creating an environment  
of attentiveness to God

The Hermitage has been serving the needs of those who are called by Jesus to "come away and rest awhile" for over 25 years. Our mission is:

—*To be a prayer community, available as a place of spiritual formation where scripture, silence, nature, group experiences, and personal companionship are cultivated elements of retreat.*

—*To provide a guesthouse away from daily tasks where pastors and other pilgrims can*

*deepen their call and relationship with God, be refreshed in their whole person and be revitalized by the presence and promise of Christ. (from The Hermitage Rule)*

We are here to welcome you.

**Resident Community:** David & Naomi Wenger, *co-directors*

**Board of Directors:** Mary Asmonga-Knapp, Kevin Driedger, Jeff Miller, Natalia Mohl, Biff Weidman, David Wenger, Naomi Wenger

*Lent 2012*

*The Hermitage  
11321 Dutch Settlement Road  
Three Rivers, MI 49093*

**JOIN US FOR TAIZÉ EVENSONG**



**SECOND SUNDAYS AT SEVEN**