



views from the hermitage

Holding Space

by Naomi Wenger

“Thank you for holding this space.”

The guest had been here for less than 4 hours. She had tried to settle into her room, but was too restless. “I thought I was supposed to be here this weekend,” she said, “but I now know that I need to be at home. Thank you for holding this space.”

This encounter is far from routine but is part of what we do here in simply holding space “open” for those who respond to the call to “come apart and rest awhile.” The welcome is so much larger than the work we do. It is in recognizing that God is both the inviter and the host. What happens on retreat does not depend or reflect on us as resident community. Rather, our task is to simply hold the space in ready openness for guests to come and receive whatever it is they need.

One guest caught this idea in a painting of The Hermitage. In the image above, there is a city in the background representing life as we live it everyday. In the spacious encircling arms are the trees, a field, a labyrinth and a living heart. All of these are part of our mission. We do not reject the “city” but keep it in our awareness as we pray here. We pray amidst the trees and fields and they are held in the encompassing of the Spirit along with our prayer practices (i.e., labyrinth) and our hearts. These hearts are not “spiritual” or kitschy but flesh and blood reality that we bring to our awareness and use to pray, explore the space, and be present.



What does it take to hold space? First, we become centered ourselves. We are held by the God who made us and who sustains us with each breath. It is this being held that supports all of the holding that we are able to do.

Next, we receive what is given to us each moment as gift. The

gifts include: people—difficult and easy, needy and giving; events—broken water pipes and sprays of flowers; conditions—willingness and willfulness; the setting—open spaces, womb-like retreats, holy corners, and hidden trails; and the Spirit, unpredictable as the wind, but comforting and catalytic.

There is a line from the poem “Special Plates” by Rumi (tr. Coleman Barks) that reads, “Look at this cup that can hold the ocean.” This is the kind of holding that we do. It is accurate to say that we hold the whole universe in the presence of God and yet we can never hold it all. Just so, each person holds a space into which God is poured but in which God cannot fit. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians concludes with this same thought that they would “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19). Holding space is both an impossible task and the work of every moment we are alive. We are, each of us, the space where God is held. And in holding that space, there is room for all to come, to receive, to give and to serve.

Retreats in 2014

Hermitage Jam Workday Friday, August 7, 9-4

This is our annual day of work and delighting in the abundance of earth, the gifts of God. If the rain stops and the sun shines, there will be abundant blackberries for picking and making into jam this year. We have some more prayer garden clearing work to be done and other tasks will be apparent by that time. We would be glad for your hands to help make our work more joyful. Please come if you can help for the whole or part of the day. You should come prepared to pick blackberries – long pants, long sleeves, a hat and gloves and work shoes. Lunch is provided at 12:30. Let us know if we can expect you. Overnight stays before or after the day should be reserved when you contact us.

Feast of the Transfiguration Retreat Saturday, August 8, 9-4 *Digging Into the Triple-Spiral Labyrinth*

The Land Restoration Committee (of the Hermitage Board of Directors) has been working on plans to restore a labyrinth to the land. The former labyrinth, an 11-circuit labyrinth, modeled on one laid into the floor in the Cathedral at Chartres, France, was removed from its site on the prairie when the new oil pipeline was being laid. It was our intention to build a new labyrinth after the pipeline completion. This hiatus has given us the opportunity to introduce our guests to the large 11-circuit labyrinth on the grounds of Gilchrist, the neighboring retreat center. It has also given us time to consider what kind of labyrinth we might like to build to replace our old one and what the best site might be for it. We have decided to install a triple-spiral labyrinth in the East Meadow. (For those of you who have been around for a long time, this was the site of the first labyrinth that was built at The Hermitage.)

The Land Restoration Committee, Margie Pfeil, Patty Hogan, Naomi Wenger and Elisabeth

Wenger, will be leading the Transfiguration Retreat, teaching about the significance of the symbol of the triple spiral, guiding retreatants in prayerful work as we finish installing this labyrinth and conducting a blessing service for this aid to our prayer.

The Triple-Spiral Labyrinth has no beginning and no end. It is made of three interlocking spirals. We can be reminded of the eternal, of the Trinity, of the unending energy of God and that God is not found in “space,” neither “here” nor “there,” but that God simply IS.

If you do a brief search for the triple-spiral labyrinth on the Internet, you will find references to Celtic Spirituality, earth-based spirituality, and deep passion. These all have a place in our decision to place a Triple-Spiral Labyrinth here. Praying this labyrinth is less a pilgrimage journey with a definite destination (the center) and more of an explorer’s wandering with rhythmic pauses (there are seven pauses: before beginning, at each spiral center, and at each pass through the labyrinth center on the way to another spiral). There is not a single way to begin or to end. Rather, you begin wherever you encounter the labyrinth and end when you have completed your journey. This opens one to a different kind of prayer than an 11-circuit labyrinth affords.



We hope that by installing this labyrinth together, we will learn and experience God’s presence and be

energized in our journey with God.

The Labyrinth at Gilchrist will continue to be available to those who are enriched by that style of labyrinth.

Join us for this day of work and prayer. We will gather at 9:00 for Morning Prayer and conclude by 4. As always, this day will include time of blessing The Hermitage buildings and grounds, a Potluck picnic lunch (let us know what you can bring), times for quiet reflection, teaching, and worship together. We will also experience work as prayer as we dig the prayer pathways into the meadow. There will be work for all levels of ability and mobility. Donations are accepted for this retreat. Overnight stays before or after can be arranged separately. Let us know by **July 25** if you plan to come.



Hermitage Way Retreat 2015
The Gift of Simplicity: Centered Living
in an Age of Distraction
October 3, 9am-4pm

Jesus reminds us: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” [Matt 6:21]. How are we invited to orient our lives toward the things that are truest and deepest? What involvements are life-giving, and where must we let go? How might we turn to Jesus and invite him to “make us sane and simple”?

Presenters, Margie Pfeil and Biff Weidman, are longtime friends of The Hermitage, and share in life of the St. Peter Claver Catholic Worker community in South Bend.

This retreat is given for followers of The Hermitage Way and for others considering a commitment to the Way. The retreat is offered

without cost to Way-keepers. Other persons should consider making a donation of \$50. Please register for this retreat by September 15.

Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality
Friday, November 6, 5 pm -
Saturday, November 7, 4 pm

Ignatius of Loyola lived during the flowering of the Renaissance (15th century) in Spain and Italy. His personal awakening gave rise to a rigorous set of reflections that he titled *The Spiritual Exercises*. Over the course of his life, he gave the Exercises to countless others, founded the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), and left a legacy of engaging the Scripture with imagination and dedication. In this retreat, led by Naomi Wenger, we will explore Ignatius’ life and some of the riches that come to us from the *Exercises*. Suggested Donation: \$100. Register by: October 15.

Prairie Prayer Gardens

The new oak savannah planting on the prairie is being flanked by two prayer gardens. After a workday on June 12, the first of the two gardens is almost complete. This garden includes a memorial to Naomi Wenger’s mother, Gertrude Ruder whose legacy of care for others is still bearing fruit. She would have enjoyed sitting in this garden and praying for those dearest to her. The gardens have seating and natural plantings as well as information about the oil that courses underground nearby. There will be opportunities to pray “over” the pipeline with an Energy that far surpasses that available from diluted bitumen and natural gas flowing underground. We hope to inspire folks to pray for earth, for our addiction to destructive energy, and for new ways of conducting our lives that help rather than harm earth. We hope to encourage restfulness above the restless “rivers” we cannot see. We hope to encourage thoughtfulness about the way we live. Ask the way to the new gardens during your next retreat.



Residential Community: What's Happening Now?

- David C. Cowles, Board Member

The idea of growing a residential community at the Hermitage has been around for quite a while now. Hosting an onsite community seemed to some, like an extension of our mission- to provide a restorative place for individuals and groups to retreat and be renewed. The very thing that the Hermitage seeks to provide, other than rest and restoration, is to build a rhythm and practice of quiet and solitude for our retreatants. What better way to practice and integrate that rhythm into daily life than to live it in a place like the Hermitage.

In our history as a retreat center, we have had individuals and couples who have spent several months serving alongside our directors so there was precedent for such a community. We have had multiple requests over the years from individuals who desired a longer stay.

As a result of the ongoing interest in residential community, the board of the Hermitage began to prayerfully and thoughtfully wade into the waters, considering what it would be like to have a small group of individuals and couples who live, work, pray and worship as "community gathered" at the Hermitage. David and Naomi, as spiritual directors and on site "overseers" of the Hermitage vision and property, were similarly engaged in praying and weighing out the implications of such a community working and living alongside them as they live out their roles and daily life. We are actively engaged in a process of discerning with a couple of folks, whether this might be the place and the rhythm for them to live their lives for a season.

One key ingredient to this process was the development of the Hermitage Way - a rule and rhythm to living the practices of the Hermitage wherever one resides. The Way was created over the last several years and made available to the wider Hermitage community. At this time a small group has adopted its rhythms and is practicing them.

Another key ingredient involves the physical site and how we might integrate a residential community on site and still maintain our full time

ministry to our retreatants. The facility we know as Nazareth, which once served "long term volunteers" was no longer considered a workable solution. (A year ago, as many of you know, Nazareth was razed and the area restored.) All of the overnight facilities in Joseph's Barn as well as the Hanby Center are full with retreatants on many weeks and weekends during the year. The logical solution was to consider a new facility, something that would serve a small community well and fit in with the rest of our landscape and facilities.

That is where we find ourselves today. We are approaching this new era in the life of the Hermitage carefully and in prayer and invite you to join us. Please contact us if you have ideas and input for our board as they take this next step.



Conservation Efforts: Can You Help?

- Deanna Risser, Board President

At their May meeting, The Hermitage board made a decision to move ahead with replacing the nearly 30 year-old gas furnaces in St. Joseph's Barn with a closed loop geothermal heating and cooling system. A major part of funding for this project comes from compensation received from Enbridge in 2013 when they expanded their underground oil pipeline that runs through the Hermitage property. At that time, this money was designated by the board to be used for energy conservation, sustainability, and to reduce our dependency on the oil that is piped under our feet.

The board has also designated additional giving from an estate gift, but this \$60,000 project still lacks about \$10,000 to complete funding. Installation of the geothermal system will begin later this month. Will you consider making a gift, or an additional gift, to The Hermitage this year to help fully fund this project? You can send us a check marked "Geothermal" or donate online at www.hermitagecommunity.org/support/.

Volunteers and Opportunities

We have been blessed with so many hands that our work is indeed lighter this spring and summer. We have regular help with laundry (Judy and Mary), mowing (Larry, Bryce and Ryder), and housekeeping (Marty and Dee). We have several short-term volunteers, Dylan, Lisa, Kyle, and Greg, who are pulling weeds, clearing trails, cutting and splitting wood, painting the shed, cooking meals, cleaning, catching up on library work and so many other tasks. We are praying and working together. The grounds and gardens are looking trim. We have an expanded vegetable garden planted and tended by Elisabeth that has begun to provide us with kale, peas and early potatoes. And the harvest will continue.

We are renovating the storeroom in The Barn to accommodate the new heat pump and back-up storage tanks. Gardens are being developed out along the prairie. We are chipping away at re-opening the yellow trail (closed by the tornado 4 years ago). We are developing a disbursed community of Hermitage Way Followers. We are praying for you, too. There is always more to tend and we delight in welcoming volunteers to help with the myriad tasks that keep us serving you in "quietness and strength."

We can use help with engine maintenance, hauling unneeded "storage" items to various re-use and recycling venues, handy-person repairs, filing, and other tasks.

Do you want to join our crew of volunteers? Let us know: 269-244-8696.

Taizé Evensong Second Sundays at 7:00 pm

Practice praying with simple chants, haunting melodies, gentle instrumental accompaniments, and the way other voices can take us to God through song. Come and bring a friend for about 50 minutes of sung prayer each month on the second Sunday at 7:00 pm. **We do not meet for Evensong in August.**

Come Live the Hermitage Way

Would you like to come for a week to pray with us? We are looking for folks to work and pray through the days, experiencing our rhythm and listening with us for what God is doing in us and in the world. If you are interested, contact David at 269-244-8696 or contact@hermitagecommunity.org. We are also looking for longer-term commitments. Let us know if you would like more information about keeping The Hermitage Way or joining the Resident Community.

Hermitage Calendar

July

12 Taizé Evensong,
7pm

August

7 Hermitage JAM, 9-3
8 Feast of the
Transfiguration
Retreat, 9-3
28 Board Meeting

September

13 Taizé Evensong,
7pm

October

3 Hermitage Way
Retreat – Simplicity,
9-4
11 Taizé Evensong,
7pm

November

6-7 Introduction to
Ignatian Spirituality,
11/6, 5 pm to
11/7, 4 pm
8 Taizé Evensong,
7pm
30 Advent Quiet Day,
9-3

December

5 Advent Quiet Day,
9-3
13 Taizé Evensong,
7pm

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Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Retreating at the Hermitage

As Jesus was revitalized for being about his Father's business by periodic withdrawal to retreat and prayer, so The Hermitage seeks in its mission:

- To be a prayer community, available as a place of spiritual formation where scripture, silence, nature, group experiences, and personal companioning 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.

If you would like to join us for a retreat of any length, contact us by phone: 269-244-8696, email: contact@hermitagecommunity.org or find us on the web: www.hermitagecommunity.org. We provide silence, solitude, Spiritual Direction, guided group retreats, space for groups to meet, community Morning Prayer, simple healthful food, walking trails, and a gentle atmosphere. You provide the willing spirit.

Contact us by Email:
contact@hermitagecommunity.org

Board of Directors:

Ned Arnold
Judith Anne Beattie
David Cowles
Kevin Driedger
Patty Hogan
Lynda Hollinger-Janzen
Margie Pfeil
Deanna Risser

Resident Community:

David and Naomi
Wenger, Co-directors

Please hold the Board in your prayers.